半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

VOLUME 9

BATTLE FOR POWER PART ONE

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

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Lifelong Friends, with the Same Dreams,
Striving to Grow into a Rising River.

DARK HORSE MANGA™

半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

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Chapter On
Haja Kenshō

No. 1:
Ihozo
Kikkō
(Part 2)

AND SO BEGINS...A DIFFERENT FATE AND KARMA, AND A NEW TOMORROW...
裏切者ぞ！
TRAITOR!
SWISH
SWISH
SWISH

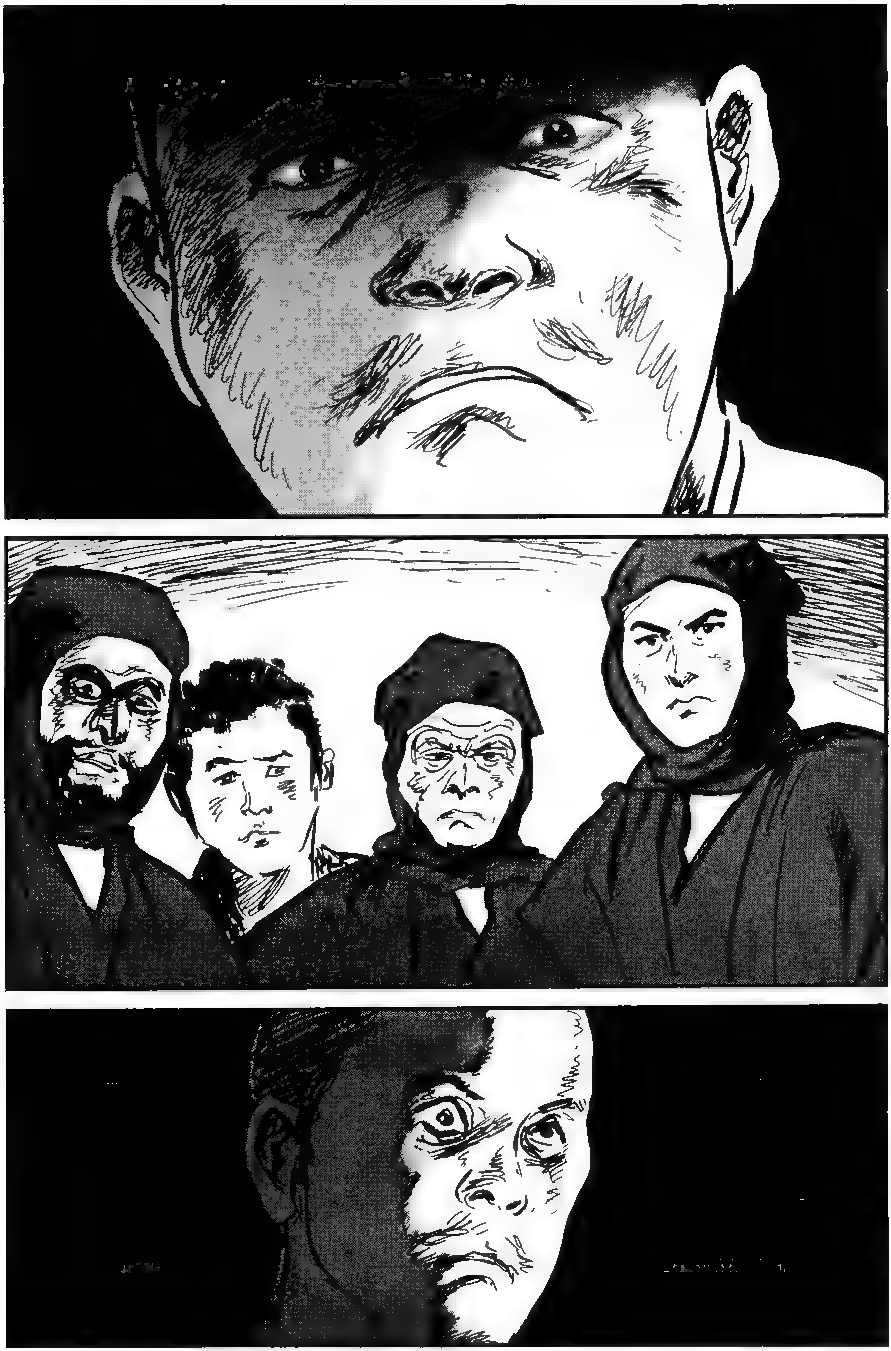
PUSH ON!
BREAK THROUGH!

O...OYAKATA-SAMAAA!!

あ
AHHH
あ
AHHHH
あ
AHHHH

AAAA

ARE YOU TATSUOKI-DONO, THE RULER OF MINŌ?
THEY ALL WANT TO SEE MY NOSE, I GUESS.
PLEASE UNMASK YOURSELF!
I AM. I AM THE SQUAT-FACED MINŌ LORD!! AH HA HA HA HA HA.



THUS, MINŌ FELL.
IT USED TO BE UNDER THE RULE OF THE TOKI CLAN, A RENOWNED SHUGO.

THEN IT WAS LED BY SAITŌ DŌSAN, YOSHITATSU AND TATSUOKI.

AND NOW MINŌ WAS IN NOBUNAGA'S HANDS.

I TOOK IT!
IT WAS A PAINFUL BATTLE FOR NOBUNAGA.
HE ABSOLUTELY HAD TO GAIN CONTROL OF MINŌ IF HE WAS GOING TO RISE UP, SERVE THE EMPEROR, AND DECLARE HIS SUPREMACY.

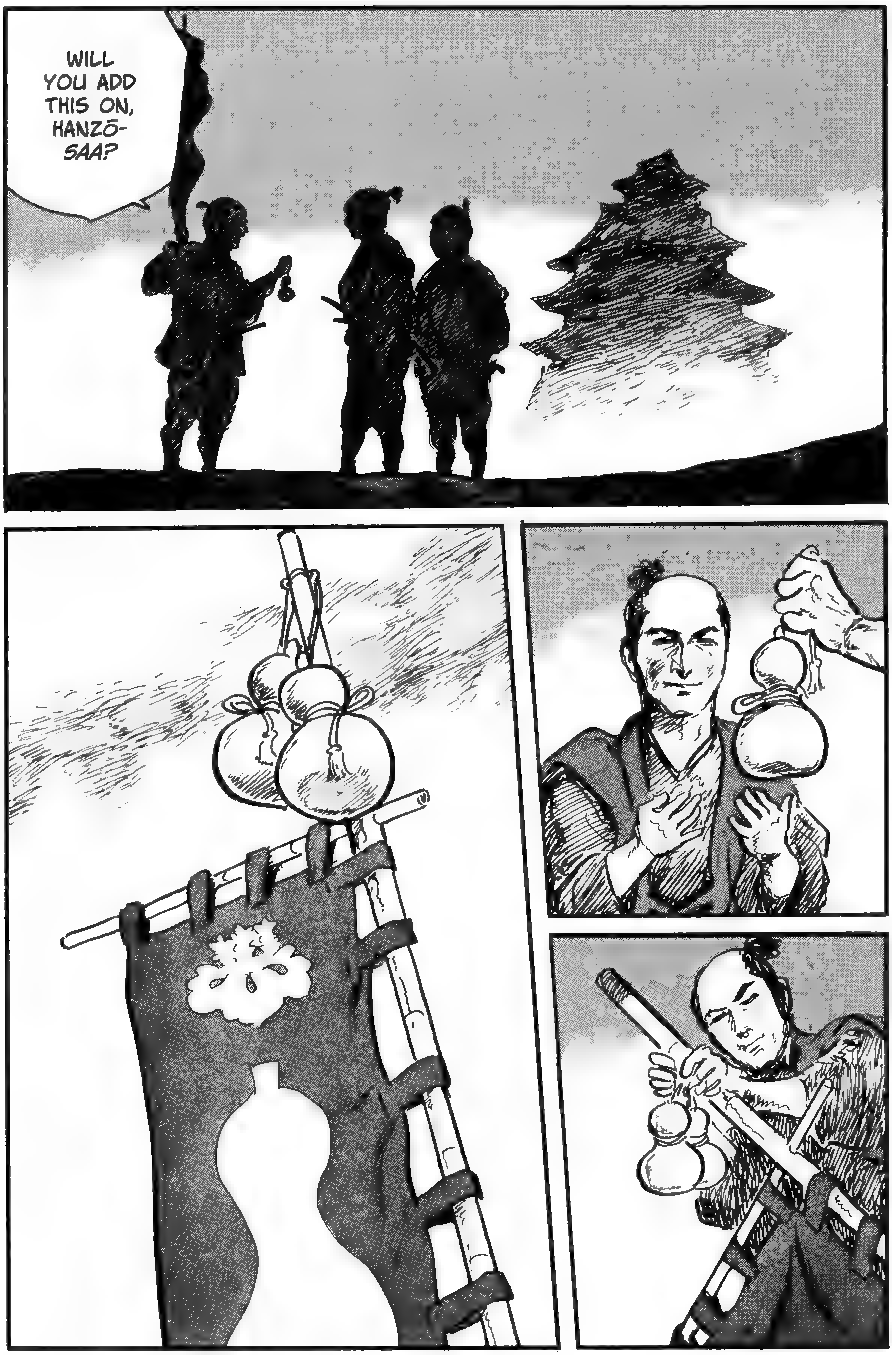
YOU HAVE A NICE BIG ONE.
YOU DO HAVE A FLAT NOSE, I SEE.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
I ENVY YOU.
MY FATHER USED TO SAY IT WOULD BE ONLY A *TENGU* WITH WINGS THAT COULD FORCE THIS CASTLE TO SURRENDER.
WHY *TENGU*?!
TENGU, I SUPPOSE.
TATSUOKI, WHAT DO YOU THINK I AM TO YOU?

UNCLE... EH?
REMEMBER I'M YOUR UNCLE!
WHAT'S SO FUNNY ?!
AH HA HA HA HA!
HA HA HA HA HA!
BUT I MIGHT STILL KILL YOU! AREN'T YOU AFRAID?
HA HA HA HA HA!
EVEN IF YOU STRIKE ME DEAD, MY NOSE IS TOO FLAT TO CHOP OFF.

YES, MILORD.
DON'T KILL TATSUOKI. JUST BANISH HIM...
YES SIR.
BALDY RAT!
IT SOUNDS LIKE YOSHITATSU DID CUT OFF DŌSAN-*DONO'S* NOSE.
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA

IF THERE'S ANYTHING YOU WANT, TELL ME.
I APPRECIATE THE TROUBLE YOU TOOK, HANZŌ MASANARI!
PLEASE.
?!
I WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE YOUR SASH, TIED, SIR.
LIKE THIS?

AND UPON MY RETURN, I SHALL HAVE IT PRESERVED THE WAY IT IS FOREVER.
I SHALL ACCEPT THIS *WA* ON MY MASTER'S BEHALF.
THANK YOU. I'M GRATEFUL, SIR.
PLEASE TELL IEYASU-*DONO*, I SHALL SEE TO IT THAT THERE WILL NEVER BE ANY REASON FOR IT TO BE UNTIED.
MMM... WELL SAID!
WA, INDEED.


WILL YOU ADD THIS ON, HANZŌ-SAA?

JUST AS NOBUNAGA-SAMA PROMISED.
THANK YOU.
I WILL HAVE A THOUSAND GOURDS SOMEDAY, BUT HANZŌ-SA, NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS I WON'T LET THIS ONE BE UNTIED.
I MUST GO!
WELL...
I AM IN YOUR DEBT. I AM.

HANZŌ-SAA!!

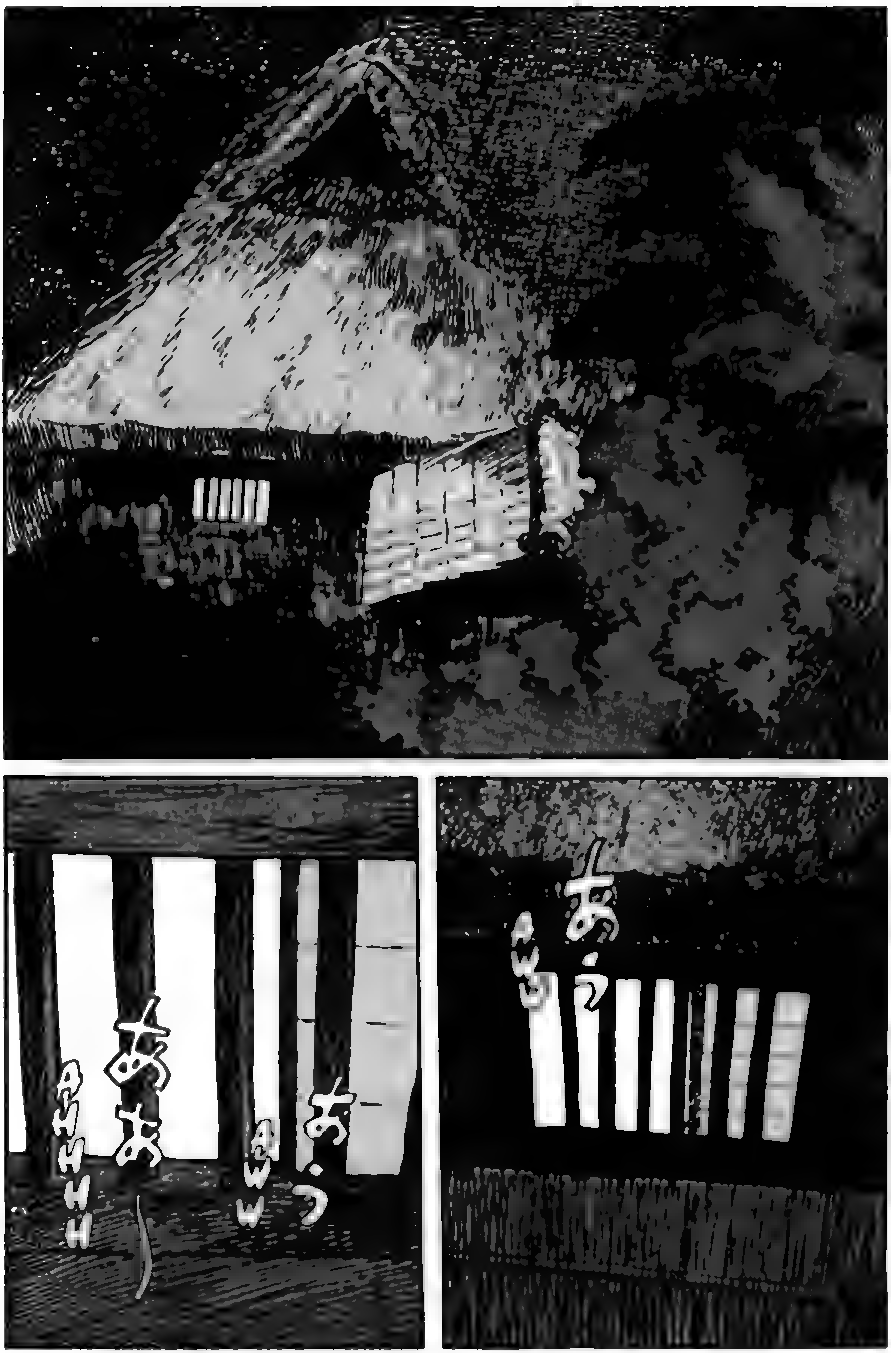
JUST... ONCE. ONCE MORE...
WE MUST PART.

I...I WON'T ASK AGAIN...

AHHH!
AHHH!
AAHHH!!

Chapter On Haja Kenshō

No. 2: A Wish To Be Alone

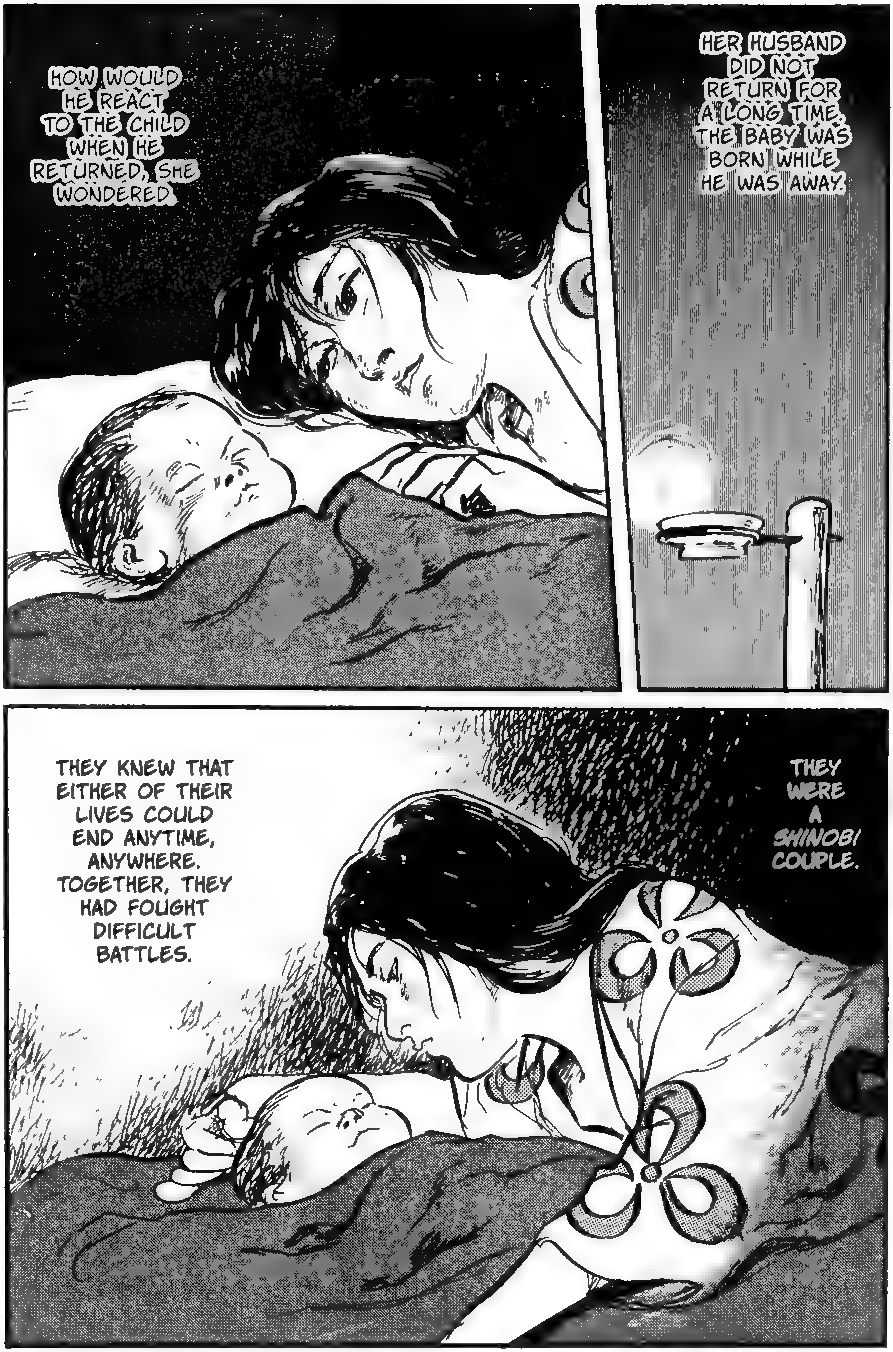

あう
AWW
あおーん
AHHH

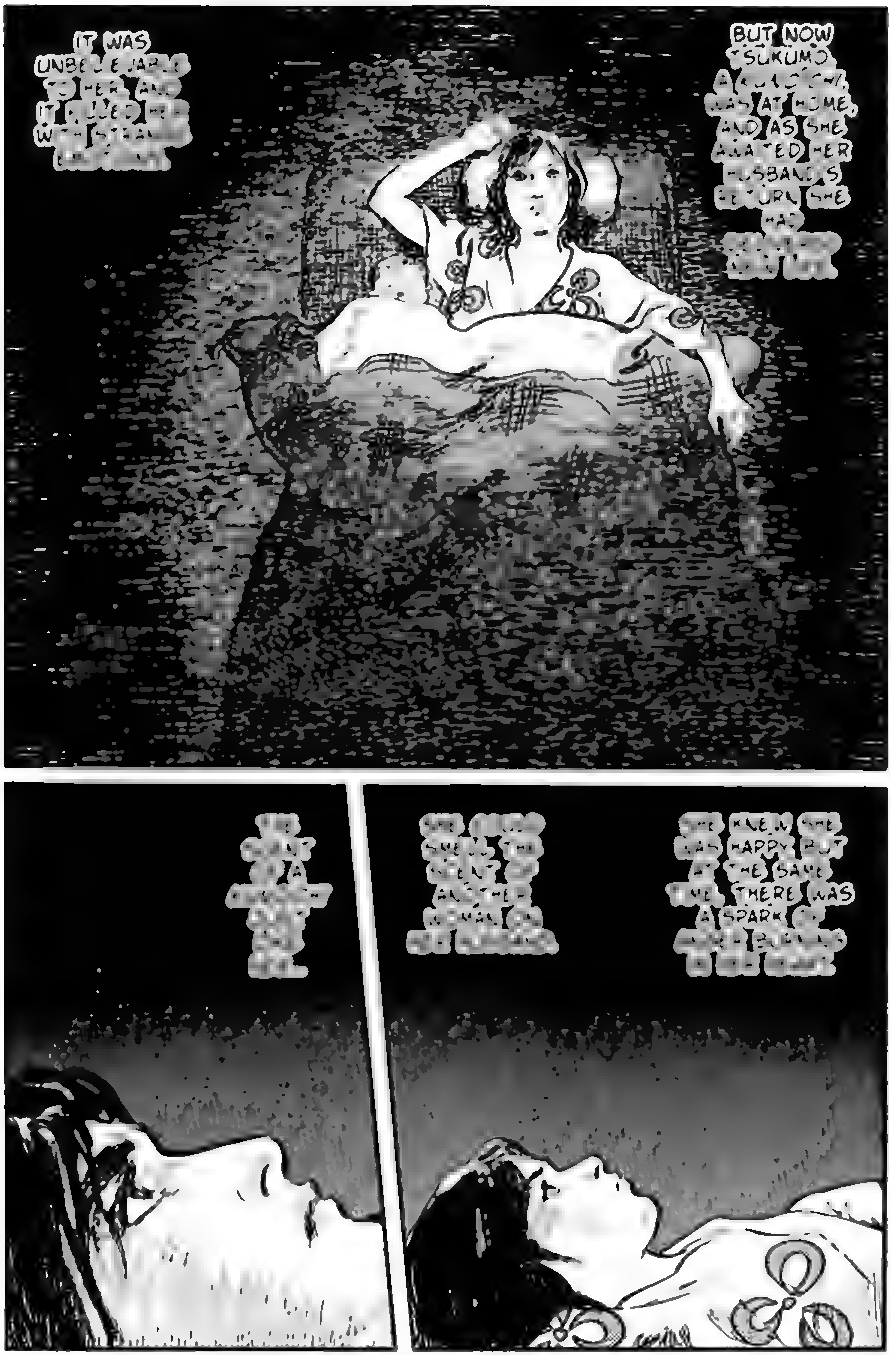
AHHHH!
AWW!

THE BABY... IT'S UPSIDE DOWN...
AAHHHH
UUUU
HAHAHAHA

HE'S OUT! IT'S OVER NOW!

IT WAS THE BIRTH OF HANZŌ MASANARI THE SECOND.


HOW WOULD HE REACT TO THE CHILD WHEN HE RETURNED, SHE WONDERED
HER HUSBAND DID NOT RETURN FOR A LONG TIME. THE BABY WAS BORN WHILE HE WAS AWAY.
THEY KNEW THAT EITHER OF THEIR LIVES COULD END ANYTIME, ANYWHERE. TOGETHER, THEY HAD FOUGHT DIFFICULT BATTLES.
THEY WERE A SHINOBI COUPLE.


IT WAS UNBEARABLE FOR HER AND IT [illegible] WITH STRAN
BUT NOW TSUKUMO A[illegible] WAS AT HOME, AND AS SHE AWAITED HER HUSBAND'S RETURN SHE HAD
SHE KNEW SHE WAS HAPPY BUT AT THE SAME TIME THERE WAS A SPARK

THIN, WITH THE POINT OF THE BLADE THE HEAVIEST. IT WAS MADE EASIER TO THROW FOR WOMEN, WHO DIDN'T HAVE MEN'S STRENGTH.
WHEN SHE'D PREPARED HER HUSBAND'S THINGS FOR HIS JOURNEY, SHE FOUND A SMALL KUNAI.
シュッ
ヒュン

HMM.
DAR-
LING.

I WISH... I WAS ALONE.
DAR- LING.
A WISH TO BE... ALONE?!

THEN SUDDENLY TSUKUMO UNDER-STOOD.
DOES THAT MEAN...HE WANTS TO BE LEFT ISOLATED?
ALONE...
INDEED, HE MUST BE ALONE. AND YET, HE CAME BACK.
SOLITUDE IS *SHINOBI'S* FATE. HAVING WIVES AND CHILDREN MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO WORK FREELY.
IT WAS OVER. HE'D LEFT THE WOMAN. AND WHILE LONELINESS GNAWED AT HIM, HE HAD FOUND HIS WAY HOME AT LAST, COMPLETELY EXHAUSTED...

DAR-
LING
YOU HAVE ME AND THE BABY YOUR WISH WILL NEVER COME TRUE THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.
IT WAS ALL OVER...

WRONG.
MAYBE THAT'S WHAT EVERY MAN WANTS.
YOU WISH TO BE ALONE...
IF WE'RE AWARE OF THAT, WE CAN APPRECIATE HOW FORTUNATE IT IS TO HAVE A FAMILY.
PEOPLE ARE LONELY BEINGS. WE ARE ALONE TO BEGIN WITH--ME, YOU, OUR BABY-- WE ALL ARE.

WE ARE SHINOBI.
AND THIS AWARENESS WILL HELP US ENDURE THE SORROW OF LOSING OUR FAMILY.
YES.
WE ESPECIALLY MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER TO BE ALONE AT HEART.

SHLUP
ちゅ
WA, IN-DEED...
WELL DONE, HANZŌ!

IF YOU WERE NOT BY MY SIDE...
...IT COULD'VE BEEN THIS SORT OF "WA."

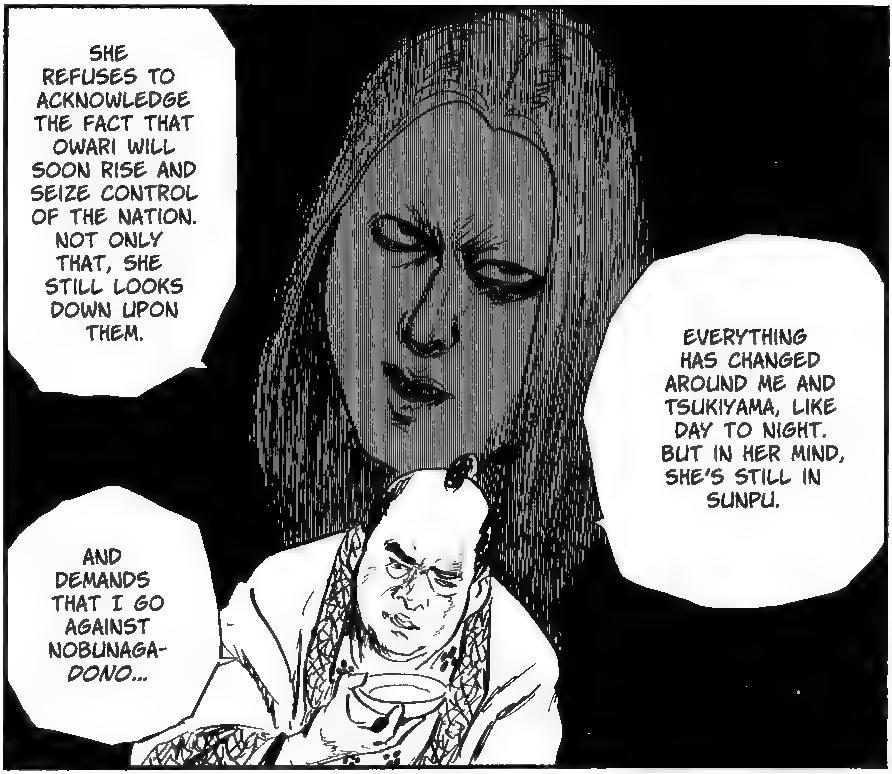
NOW THAT MINŌ HAS FALLEN, NOBUNAGA-*DONO* MUST HAVE RESOLVED TO MARCH ON THE CAPITAL.
I WILL FORM A PART OF IT TOO...
HOLDING HANDS, MAKING "*WA*," THE WHOLE COUNTRY WILL COME INSIDE HIS CIRCLE, EH?
ABOUT THIS MUCH.

IF THERE IS ANYONE WHO'D BREAK SUCH "WA"...
THE "WA" WE HAVE WITH OWARI WILL BE SHATTERED TOO.

TWO YEARS PASS, THEN FIVE. THEY CHANGE EVERY MONTH. THAT'S THE WAY IT IS. THAT'S THE WAY WE ARE.
BOTH MEN AND WOMEN UNDERGO CHANGES... HE WON'T BE THE MAN SHE FIRST MET, AND SHE WON'T BE THE WOMAN HE FIRST SAW.

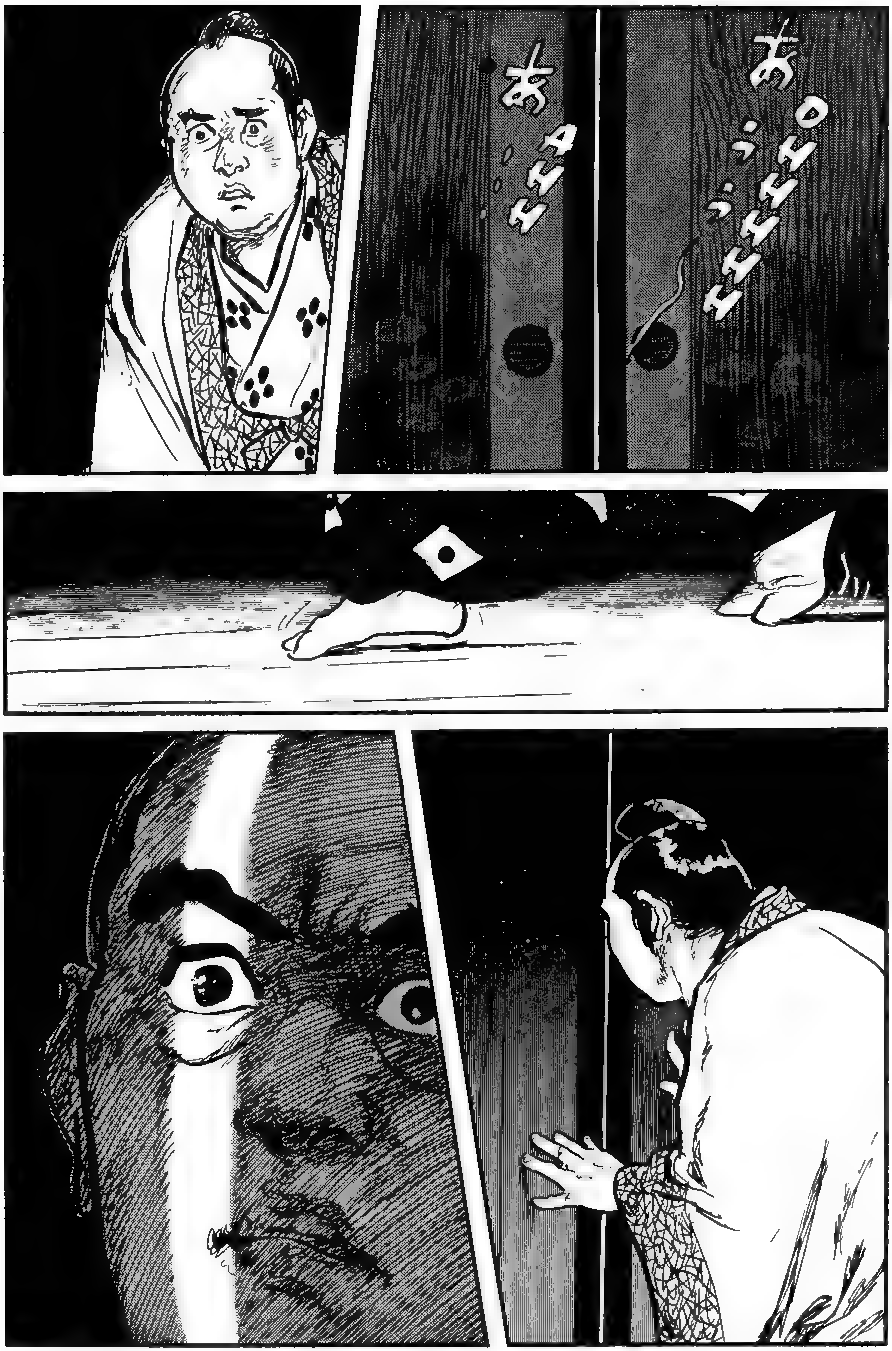
AND AS THEY CHANGE... IF HE ADAPTS TO IT AND CONTINUES TO LOVE HER, THERE WILL BE NO TROUBLE.

THEY SIMPLY KEEP ON LOOKING FOR THE IMAGE OF THE OTHER AS THEY FIRST MET.
BUT NEITHER THE MAN NOR THE WOMAN WANTS THE OTHER TO CHANGE EVEN IF THEY CHANGE THEMSELVES.


SHE REFUSES TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE FACT THAT OWARI WILL SOON RISE AND SEIZE CONTROL OF THE NATION. NOT ONLY THAT, SHE STILL LOOKS DOWN UPON THEM.
AND DEMANDS THAT I GO AGAINST NOBUNAGA-DONO...
EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED AROUND ME AND TSUKIYAMA, LIKE DAY TO NIGHT. BUT IN HER MIND, SHE'S STILL IN SUNPU.

WELL, IF I CAN AT LEAST MAINTAIN THAT "WA" BY CONTINUING TO LOVE MY WIFE EVEN THOUGH SHE'S CHANGED...

MAYBE IT'S MORE DIFFICULT THAN WAR ITSELF.
THE "WA" OF HUSBAND AND WIFE...
SO LONG AS I THINK THAT WAY, WE'LL BE FINE, I GUESS.
LET ME BE WITH HER TONIGHT. IT'S BEEN TOO LONG.
HICCUP


おやすみ、
おやすみ

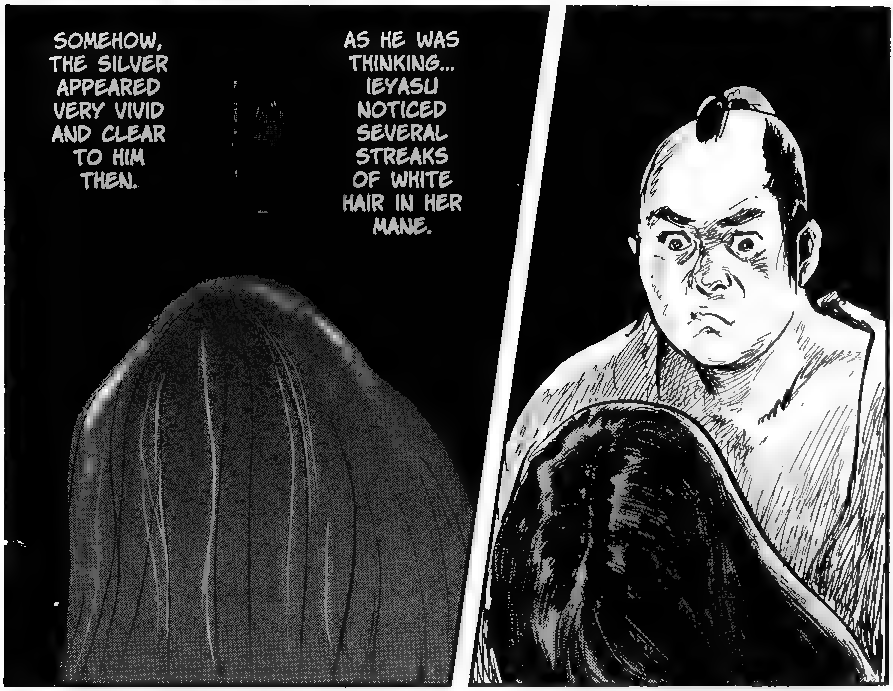
あ…ふ…
AHHHH
ああ…
いいい

あOOH
ああ
AHHHH

WHO'S THERE!!
ME... IT'S ME.
THE SAKE... I HAD TOO MUCH TO DRINK... ER... HA HA HA HA.
HE WISHED HE WAS ALONE. IN THAT MOMENT, HE LONGED WHOLE-HEARTEDLY FOR IT. IF HE WAS NOT MARRIED, HE WOULD NOT HAVE TO SEE HIS WIFE CHANGE, AND HE WOULD NOT HAVE TO BE SO VERY CONSIDERATE.
THUMP
WA!

IT'S LONESOME TO BE AWAY ALL THE TIME.
ER... NO.
DID SOMETHING GOOD HAPPEN? YOU WOULDN'T DRINK SO MUCH OTHERWISE.
GARA
OH. IS THAT SO?
YOU LOOK SO UNCERTAIN AND HELPLESS TONIGHT, THE WAY YOU USED TO BE. OH HO HO HO HO.
OH HO HO HO
WELL, DOES IT MATTER? THERE ARE TIMES WHEN IT'S AWKWARD TO COME HERE SOBER, YOU KNOW.

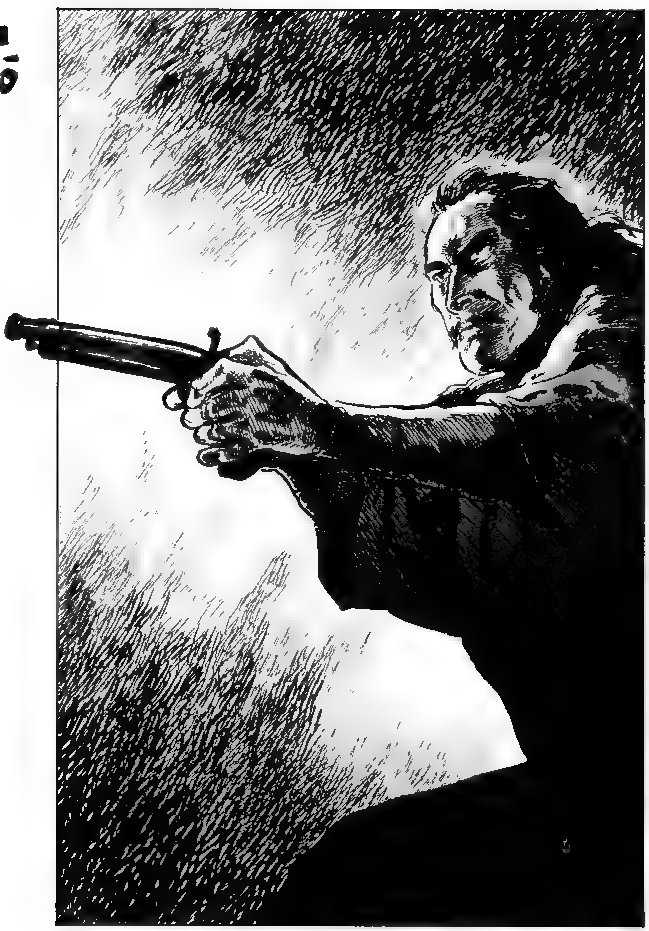
I WANTED TO BE ALONE, BUT THIS IS THE OPPOSITE.
あぁぁぁぁ
あぁぁぁぁ

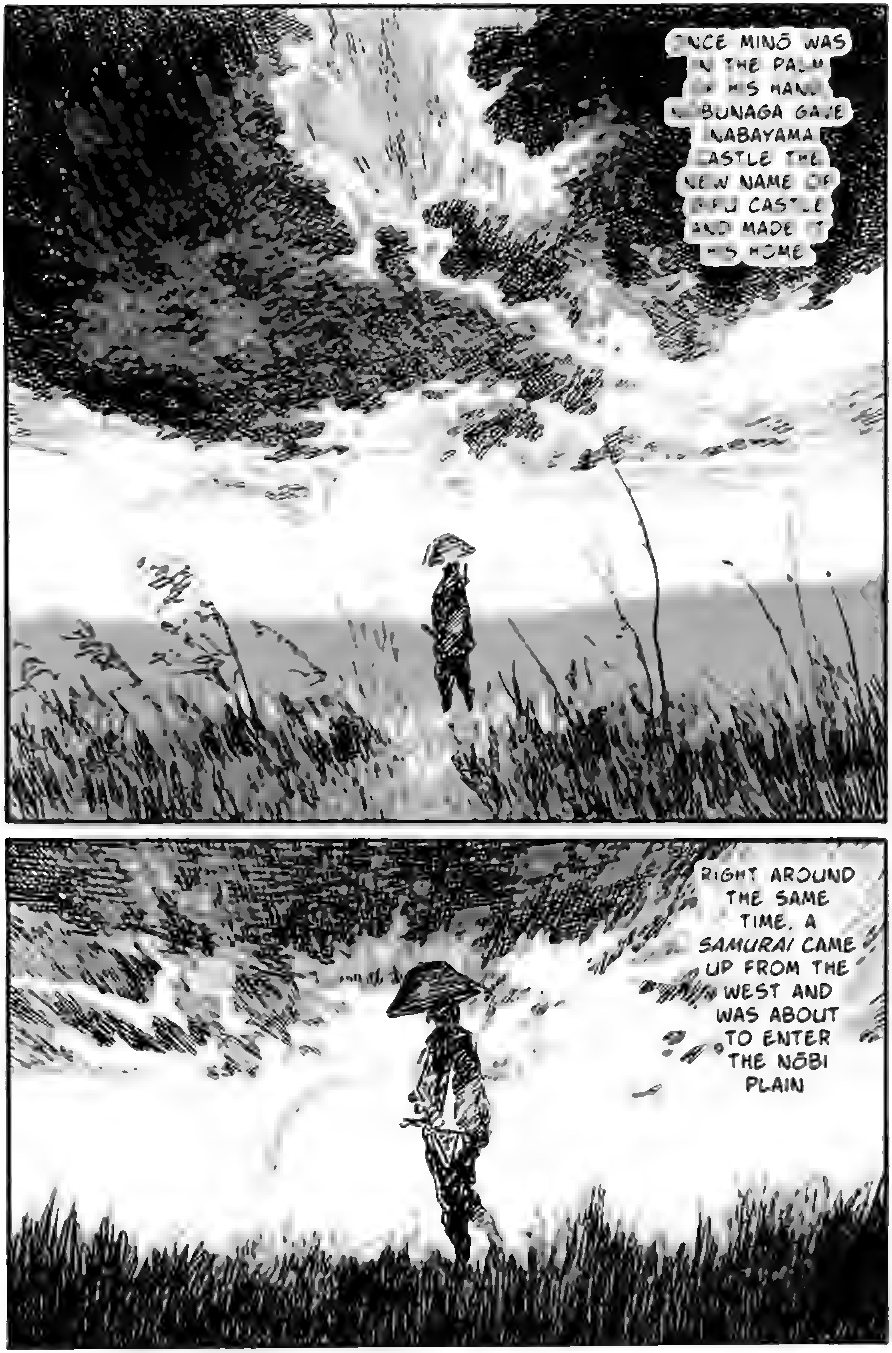

SOMEHOW, THE SILVER APPEARED VERY VIVID AND CLEAR TO HIM THEN.
AS HE WAS THINKING... IEYASU NOTICED SEVERAL STREAKS OF WHITE HAIR IN HER MANE.

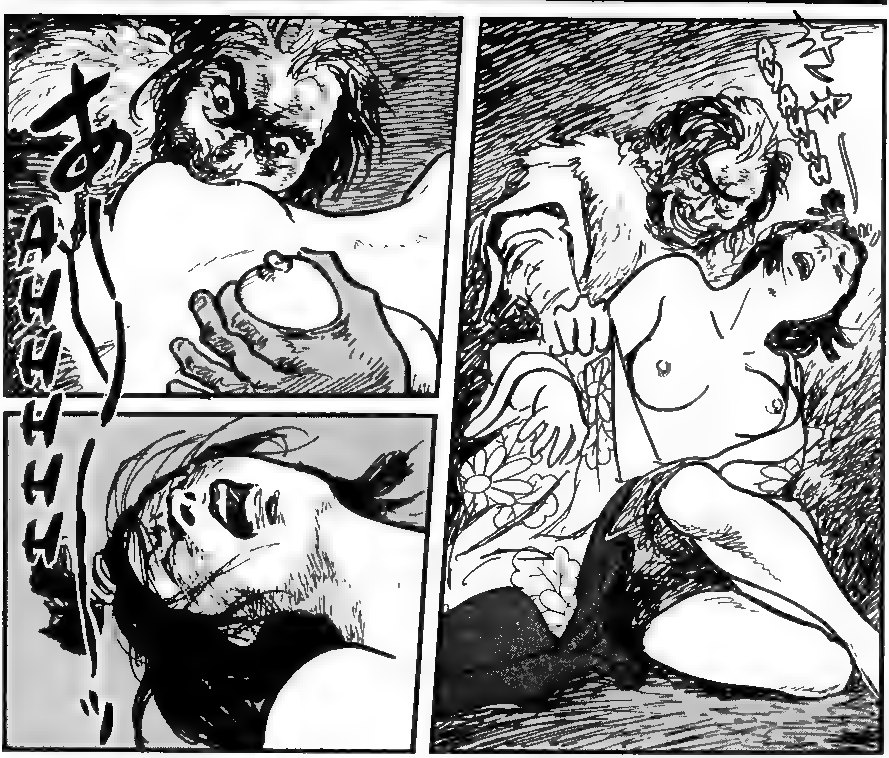
OW
PLIP
IS SOME-THING WRONG?
IT'S GOOD TO BE NICE TO A CHANGING WIFE, I SHOULD THINK.
HER HAIR IS TURNING GRAY. SHE'S BEEN WITH ME THAT LONG.
THIS IS THE "WA" BE-TWEEN US.
?!

Chapter On Haja Kenshō

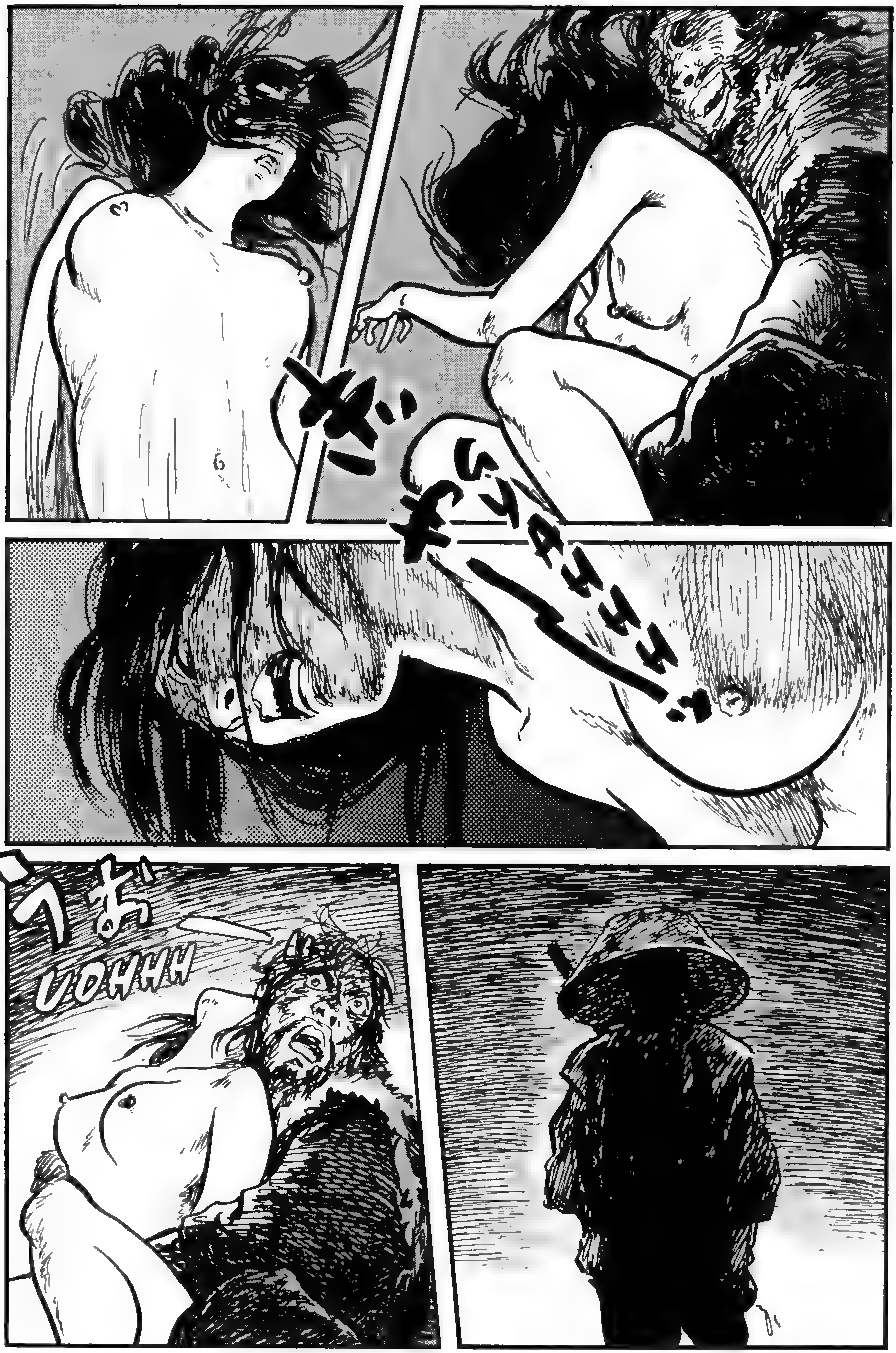
No. 3: Kyōyū

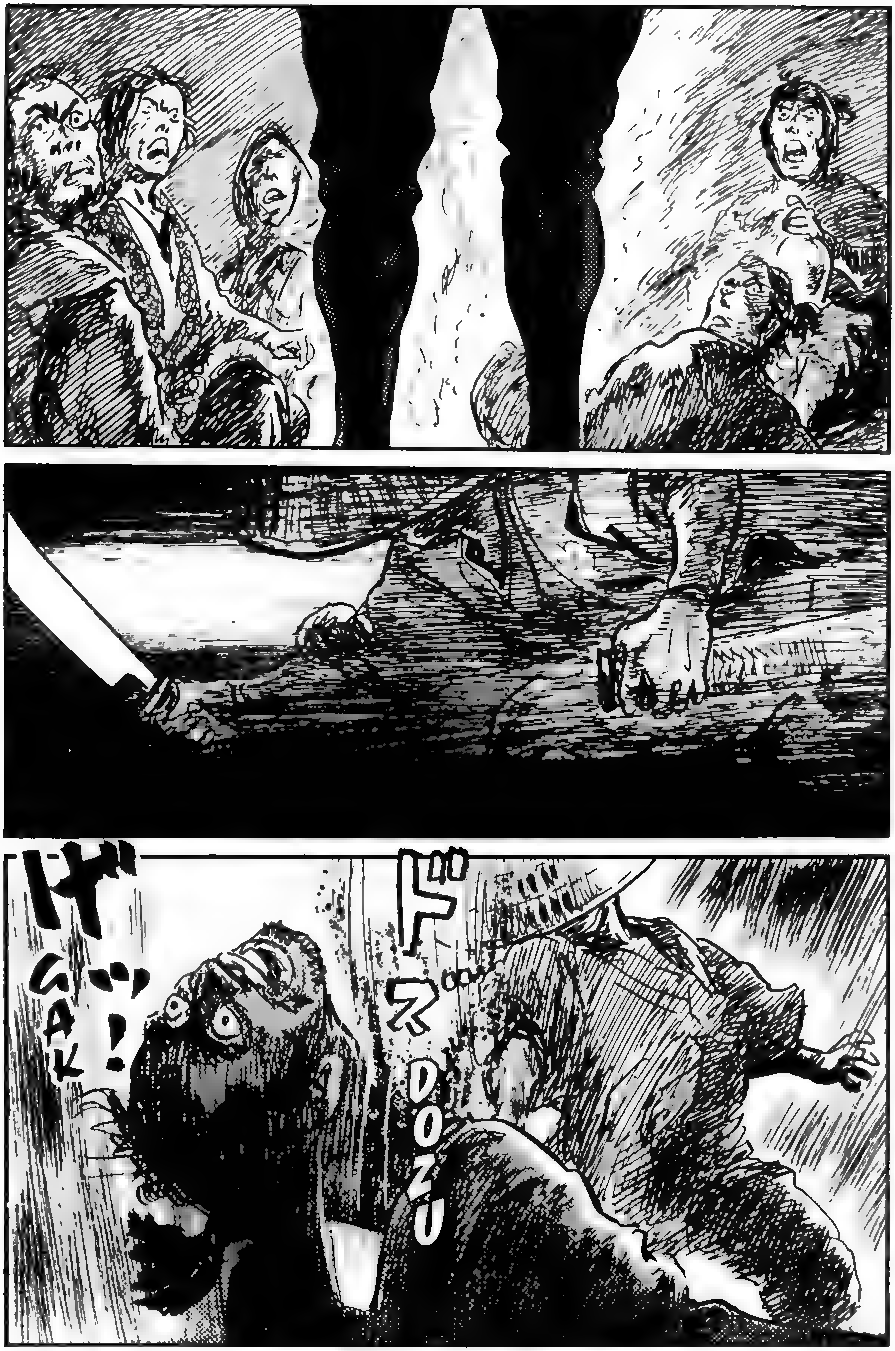



ONCE MINŌ WAS IN THE PALM OF HIS HAND, BUNAGA GAJŌ NABAYAMA CASTLE THE NEW NAME OF GIFU CASTLE AND MADE IT HIS HOME
RIGHT AROUND THE SAME TIME, A SAMURAI CAME UP FROM THE WEST AND WAS ABOUT TO ENTER THE NŌBI PLAIN


あ
AHHHHH!!

AHHHH
NOOOO

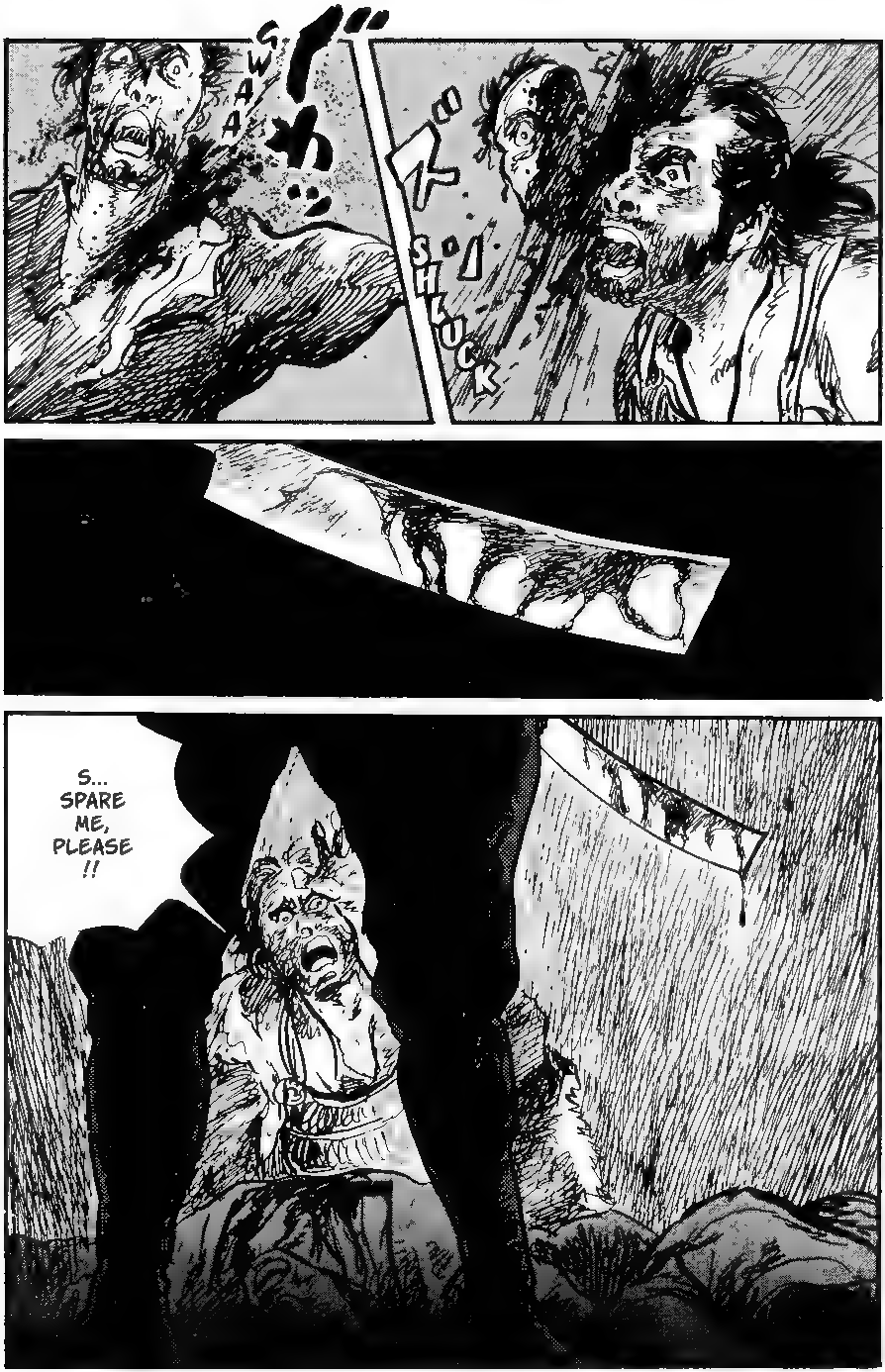

ぎゃーっ
うお
UOHHH!


げっ！
GAK
ドズ
DOZU

WHOA
YOU BASTARD!
WHO THE HELL?!

GUWAH
BWAM

WAHHH
THUK
THUK
GAK

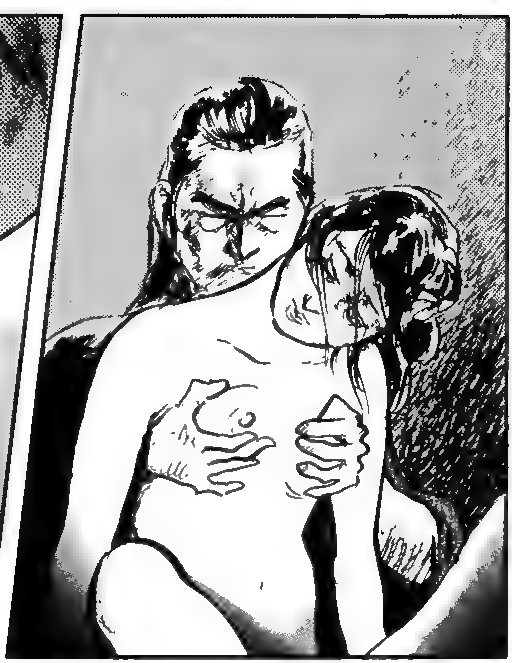

SAW
SHUCK
S... SPARE ME, PLEASE !!

HMPH.
ANYTHING YOU WANT, PLEASE SPARE ME!
I'LL GIVE YOU GOLD! AND THE WOMAN! FOOD AND HORSES TOO!!
ハロー TUR

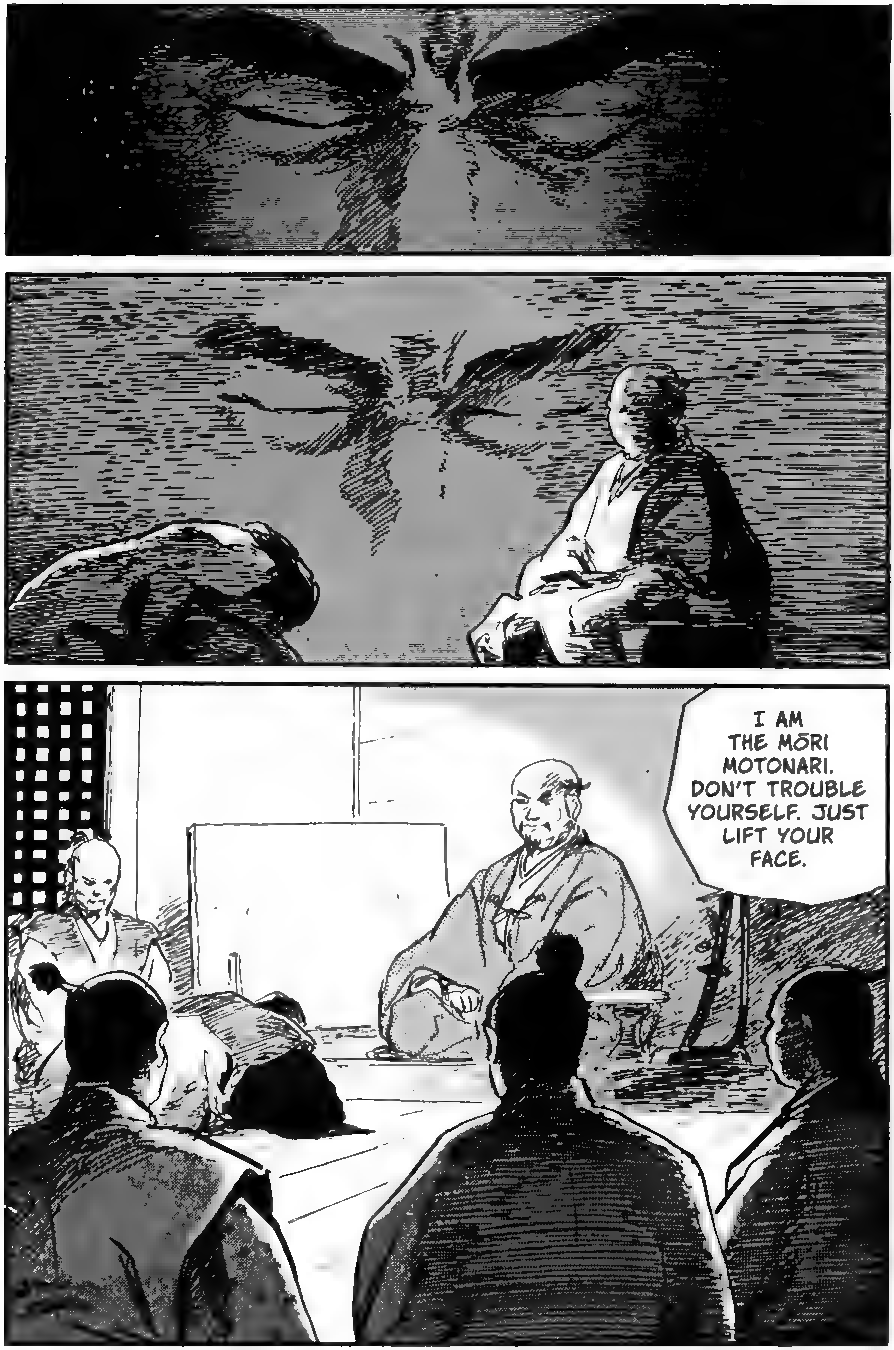
WINTER
AUTUMN
冬秋夏春
SUMMER
SPRING
ADD A KANJI CHARACTER TO EACH. DO IT WELL, AND I'LL CONSIDER LETTING YOU GO.
BLACK WINTER
WHITE AUTUMN
玄白朱青
冬秋夏春
VERMILLION SUMMER
BLUE SPRING

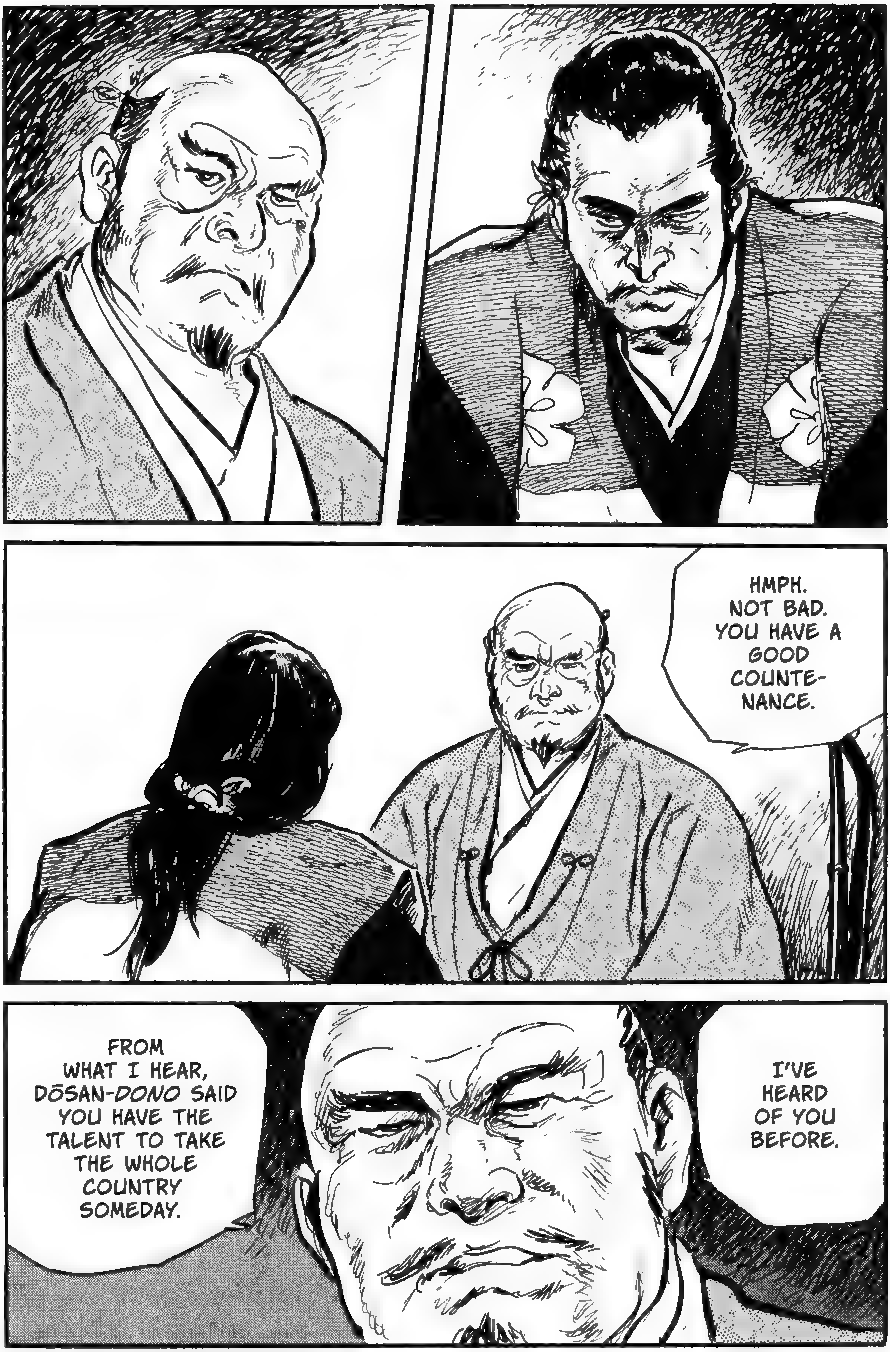
NO... NO WAY... I CAN'T!
DON'T JUST WRITE THE TERMS THAT ALREADY EXIST. USE YOUR BRAIN AND MAKE UP YOUR OWN.
WHAT I DESPISE MOST IN THIS WORLD IS BANDITS, THIEVES AND SUCH.
GAAH
SCHLUK
春 SPRING SPROUT
夏 遊前 SUMMER PLAY
秋 狩 AUTUMN HUNT
冬 養 WINTER NURTURE

COME HERE.
AKECHI JŪBEI MITSUHIDE WAS THIRTY-FOUR.
OR HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN THIRTY-TWO OR THIRTY-NINE. HISTORY DOES NOT PROVIDE HIS EXACT AGE.

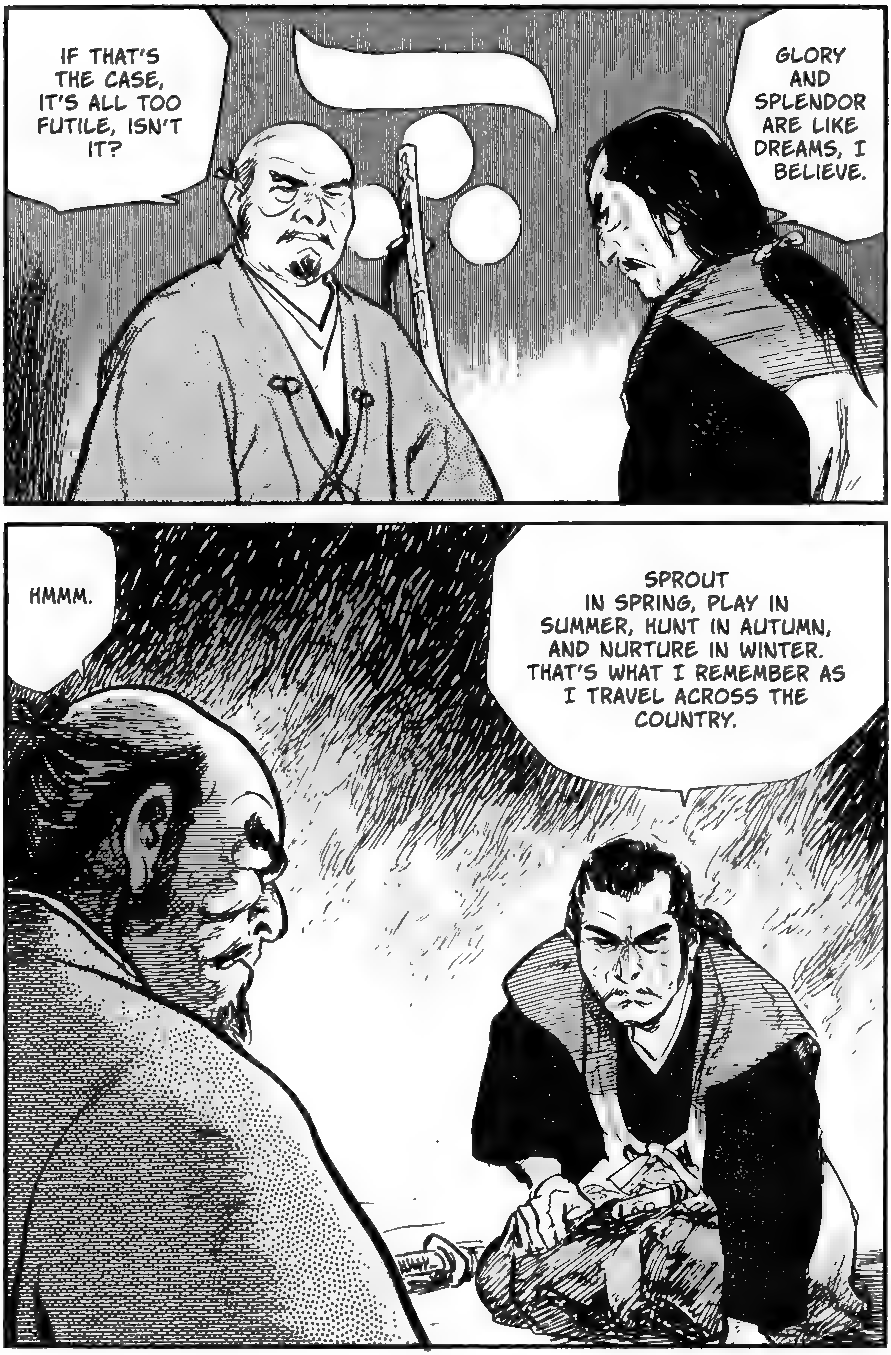


BACHI
BACHI


I AM THE MŌRI MOTONARI. DON'T TROUBLE YOURSELF. JUST LIFT YOUR FACE.

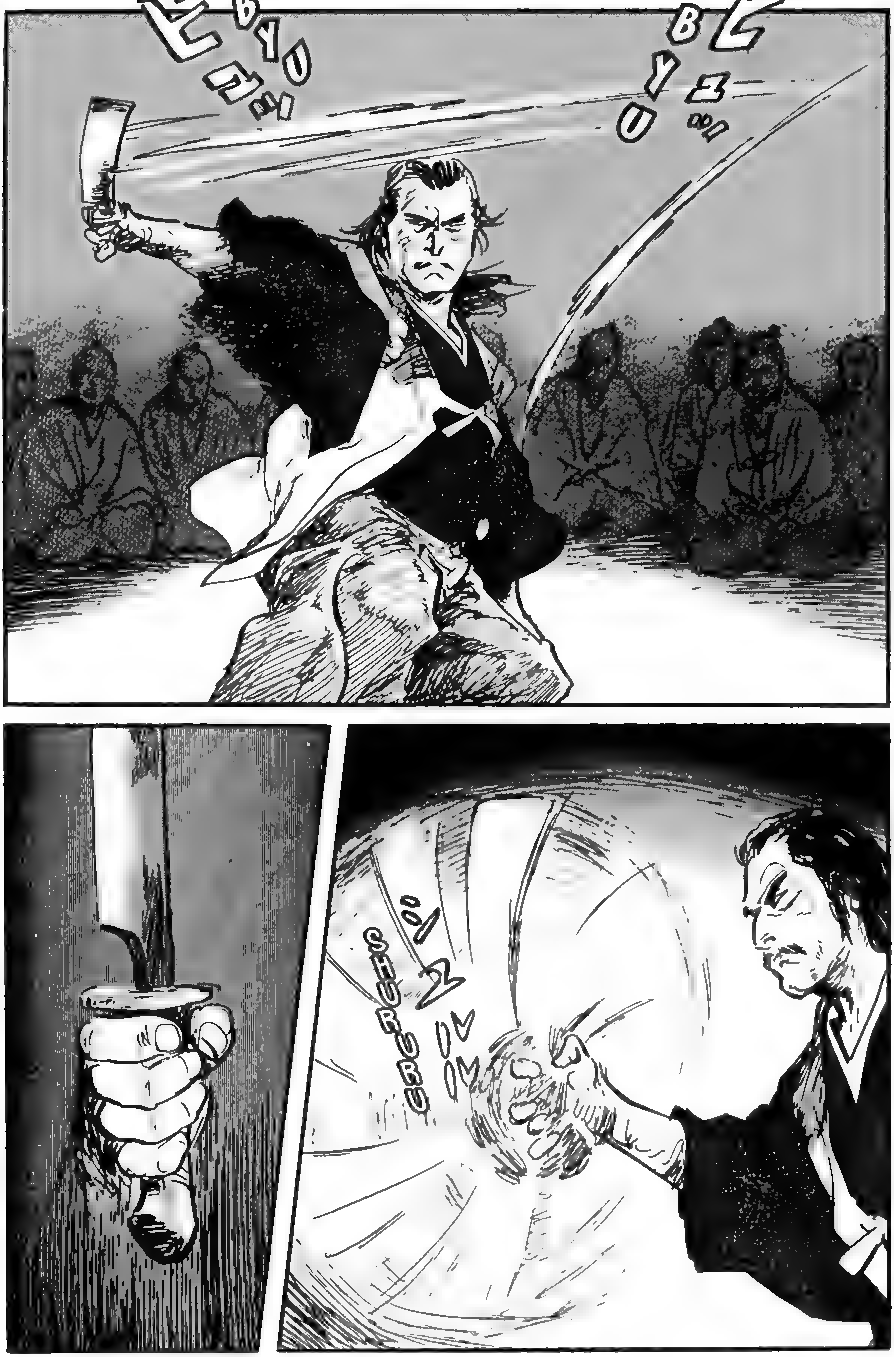

HMPH. NOT BAD. YOU HAVE A GOOD COUNTE-NANCE.
FROM WHAT I HEAR, DŌSAN-*DONO* SAID YOU HAVE THE TALENT TO TAKE THE WHOLE COUNTRY SOMEDAY.
I'VE HEARD OF YOU BEFORE.

A HALF MAT WHEN AWAKE, A MAT WHEN ASLEEP, AND TWO CUPS AND A HALF EVEN WHEN RULING THE NATION. THAT'S WHAT A MAN IS, THEY SAY.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
MMG.
A MAN NEEDS HALF OF A *TATAMI* WHEN HE'S AWAKE, A *TATAMI* WHEN HE'S ASLEEP.
AND HE EATS TWO AND A HALF CUPS OF RICE EACH DAY EVEN IF HE IS THE SHOGUN. THAT'S WHAT MAN IS, YOU MEAN?
NO LESS AND NO MORE. THAT'S WHAT A MAN IS. I ALWAYS KEEP THAT IN MIND.


IF THAT'S THE CASE, IT'S ALL TOO FUTILE, ISN'T IT?
GLORY AND SPLENDOR ARE LIKE DREAMS, I BELIEVE.
HMMM.
SPROUT IN SPRING, PLAY IN SUMMER, HUNT IN AUTUMN, AND NURTURE IN WINTER. THAT'S WHAT I REMEMBER AS I TRAVEL ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

AND THROUGH ALL MY EXPERIENCE, I LEARNED MANY THINGS I NEVER WOULD HAVE KNOWN IF I REMAINED IN MINŌ.
IT'S ALREADY TEN YEARS SINCE I BECAME A DRIFTER, DURING MINŌ'S CIVIL CONFLICT IN KŌJI.
THIS IS ONE OF THEM.

DISGUISED AS A WOODCUTTER, I CAN BUY ONE EASILY, WITHOUT BEING QUESTIONED. AND YET, IT'S A VICIOUS WEAPON.
IT DOESN'T BREAK. IT'S EASY TO USE AND CARRY. AND IT'S USEFUL BOTH IN BATTLE AND IN EVERYDAY LIFE.
BYUU
BYUU

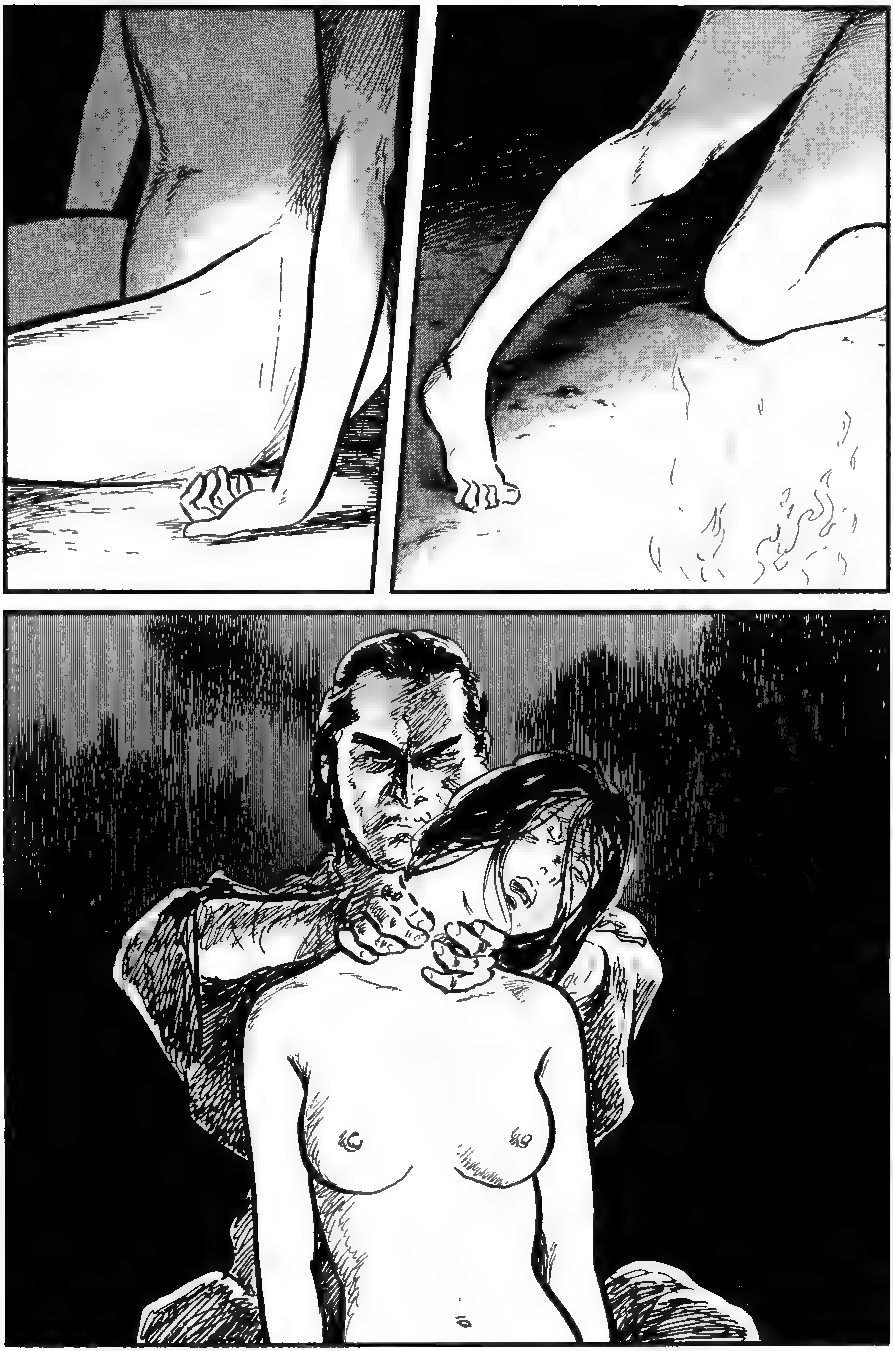

ヒュバッ
ヒュバッ
ゴゴゴゴゴ
ゴゴゴゴゴ

BLOW
THE WAY YOU SWING THIS AROUND--WHAT TREMENDOUS STRENGTH YOU HAVE.
HEAVY.

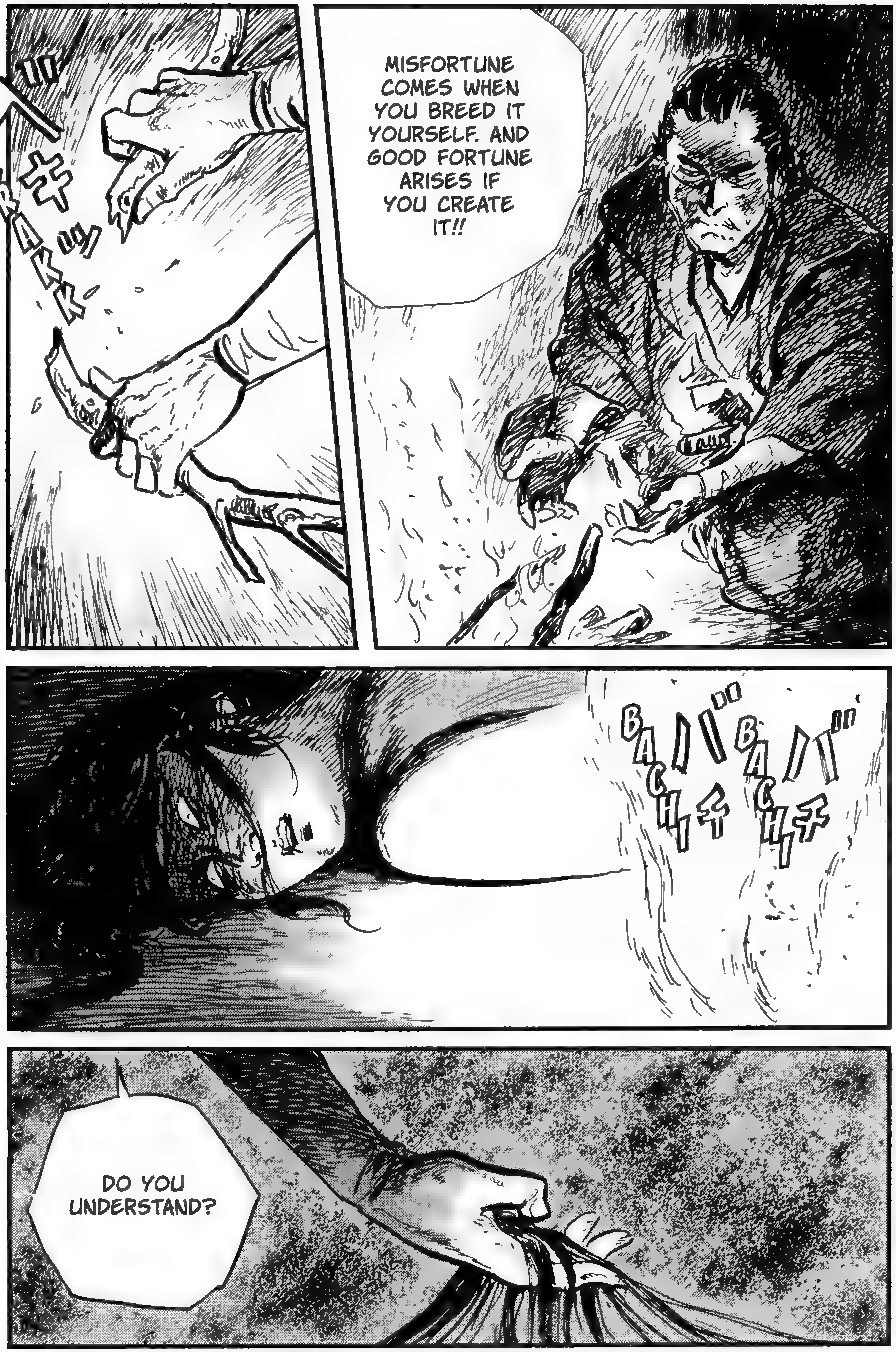
WHAT DID MOTONARI-SAMA SAY?
BE IT TALENT, DIGNITY, OR TECHNIQUE, YOU LACK NONE. "HE IS A FORMIDABLE MAN INDEED," HE SAID.
HE SAYS YOU ARE A MAN WITHOUT FAULT.
"BUT I LIKE MEN WITH FAULTS," HE ADDED.

"A MAN WHO HAS NO FLAWS NEEDS NO ONE TO COMPLEMENT HIM. THAT IS WHY HE IS ALWAYS ALOOF.
"BY COMPLEMENTING WHAT THE OTHER LACKS, A MASTER AND A SERVANT BUILD AFFECTION AND FRIENDSHIP.
"AND THIS GENERATES A LACK OF HARMONY, WHICH MAY BRING ABOUT SERIOUS PROBLEMS LATER ON," HE SAID.

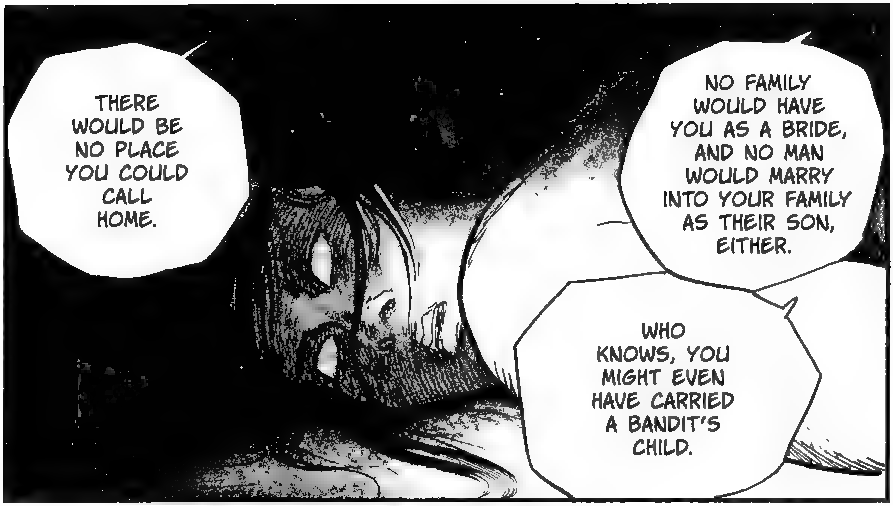
AKECHI JŪBEI MITSUHIDE. HE WAS, INDEED, A MAN WITHOUT FAULT...BUT MŌRI MOTONARI, A GREAT LEADER OF CHŪGOKU, SAW THROUGH IT. HE SAW THAT MITSUHIDE WAS A KYŌYŪ.



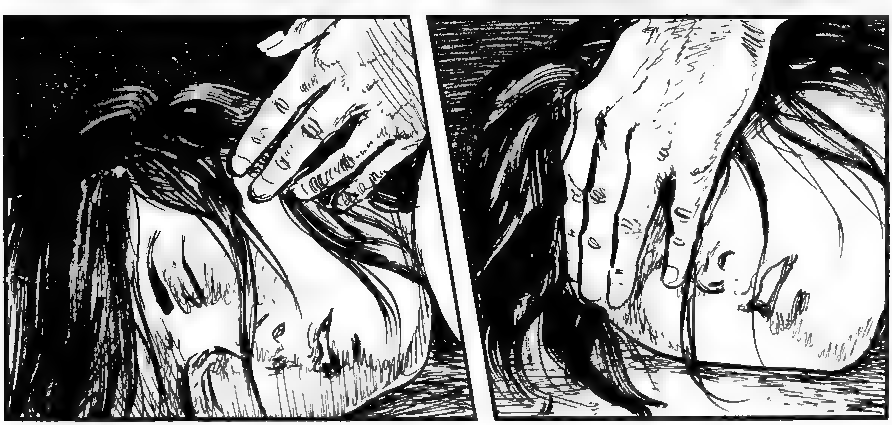
KRRRRR
AKKKKK

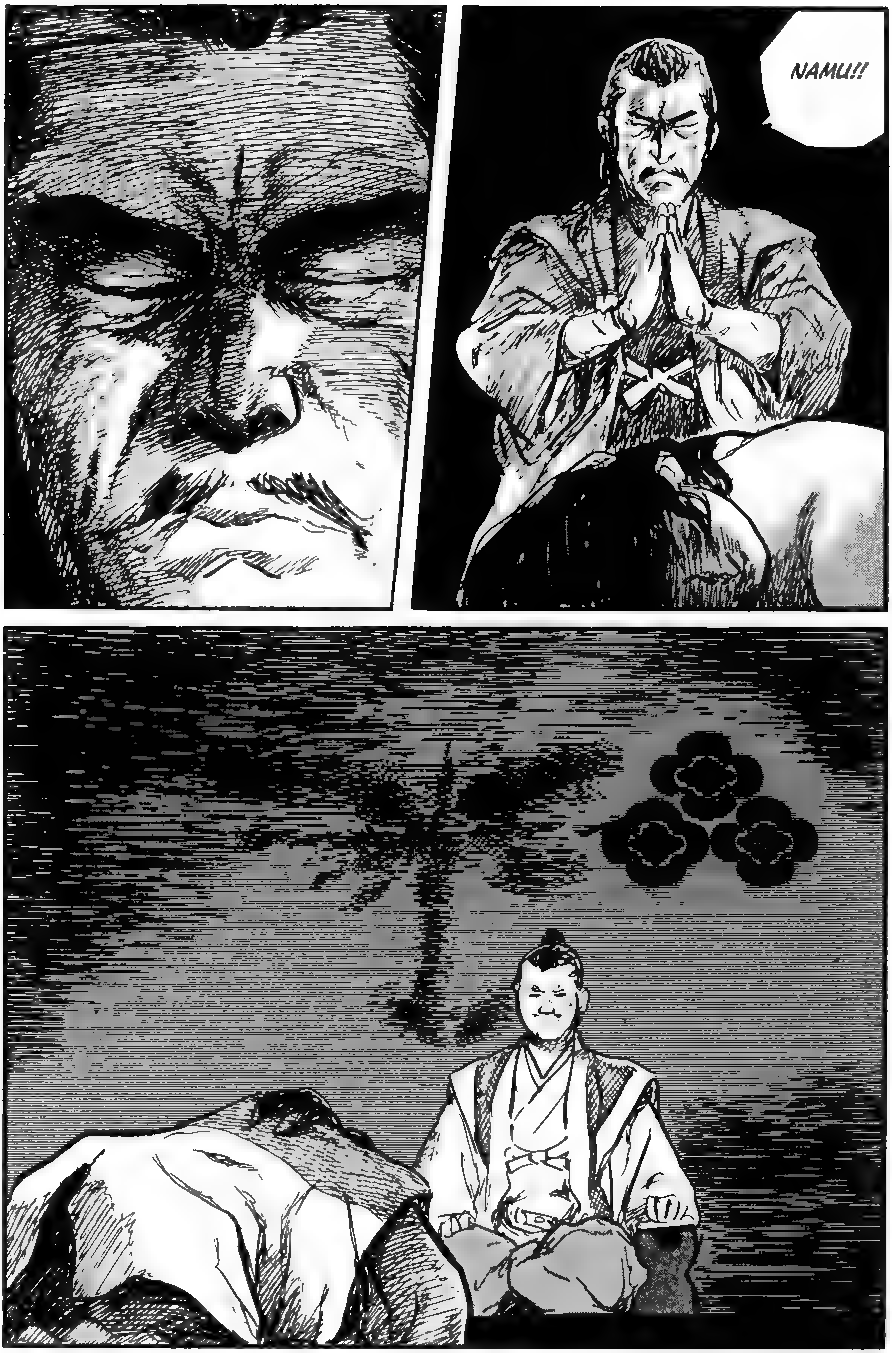

MISFORTUNE COMES WHEN YOU BREED IT YOURSELF. AND GOOD FORTUNE ARISES IF YOU CREATE IT!!
DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

BANDITS ABDUCTED AND MOLESTED YOU. YOU SHOULD KNOW YOU ASKED FOR THIS YOURSELF.
NO FORTUNE, GOOD OR BAD, BEFALLS ANYONE BY CHANCE. PEOPLE BUILD IT THEMSELVES.
BUT I CAN SEE HOW YOUR LIFE WOULD BECOME POISONED WITH UNHAPPINESS.
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EASY ENOUGH TO SAVE YOU AND TAKE YOU BACK TO YOUR PARENTS.
THE FACT THAT THEY FOUND YOU WAS NOT COINCIDENCE. IT WAS A DISASTER OF YOUR OWN MAKING.

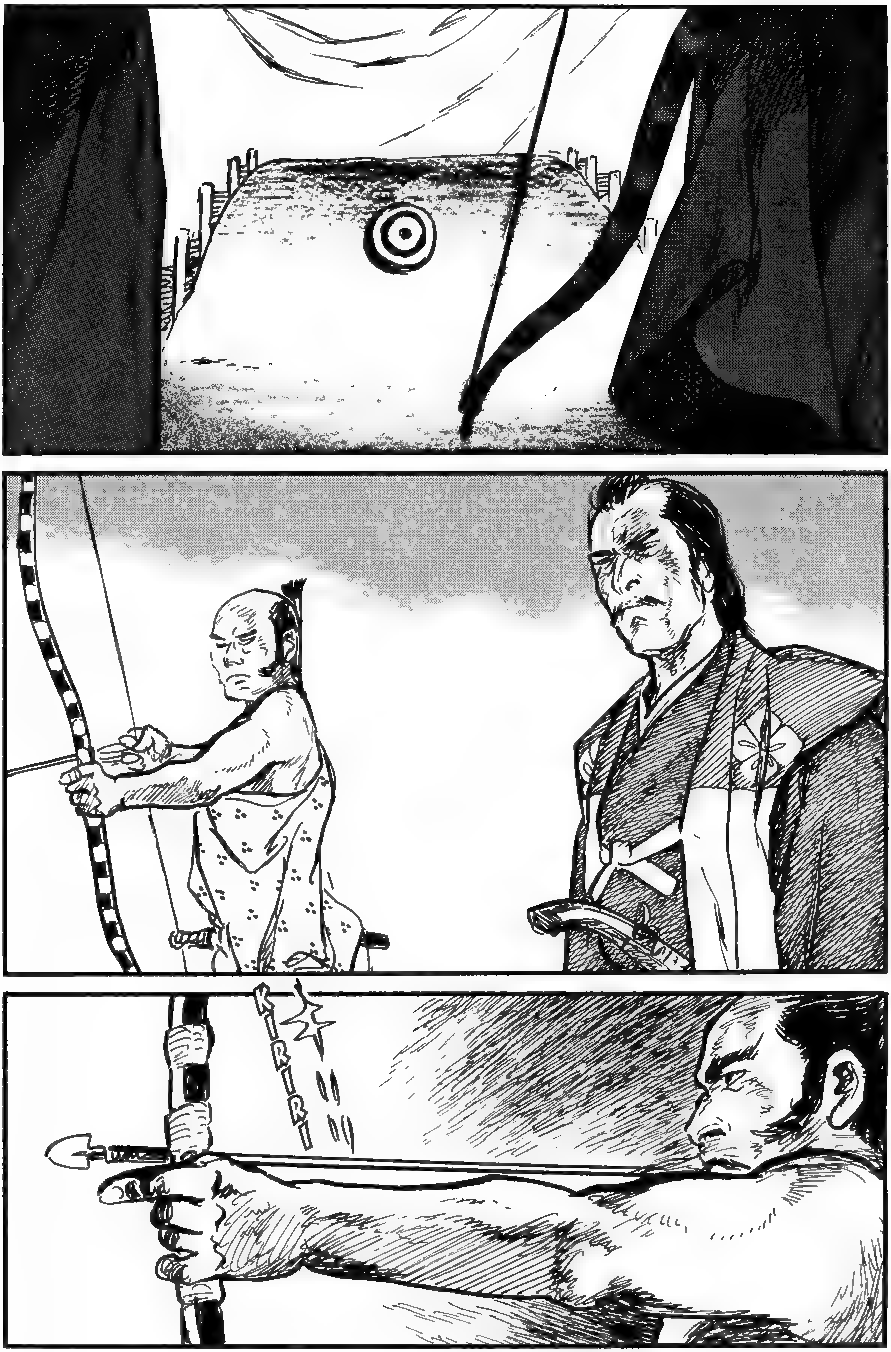

THERE WOULD BE NO PLACE YOU COULD CALL HOME.
NO FAMILY WOULD HAVE YOU AS A BRIDE, AND NO MAN WOULD MARRY INTO YOUR FAMILY AS THEIR SON, EITHER.
WHO KNOWS, YOU MIGHT EVEN HAVE CARRIED A BANDIT'S CHILD.

YOU CAN DEPART TO THE NETHERWORLD AS A SAMURAI'S WOMAN. YOU SHOULD BE HAPPY ABOUT THAT!
THAT'S WHY I, A DESCENDANT OF SEIWA GENJI, MADE LOVE TO YOU. BY DOING SO, YOU WERE PURIFIED OF WHAT YOU SUFFERED FROM THOSE LOWLY MEN.




NAMU!!

IF YOU PROVE YOUR SKILL IS SUPERIOR, I'LL GIVE YOU A HUNDRED MEN AND PUT YOU IN CHARGE OF OUR MUSKET COMPANY.
IT'S BEEN BROUGHT TO MY ATTENTION THAT YOU ARE AN EXCELLENT SHOT. SHOW ME YOUR MASTERY.
YES SIR.


KIRI

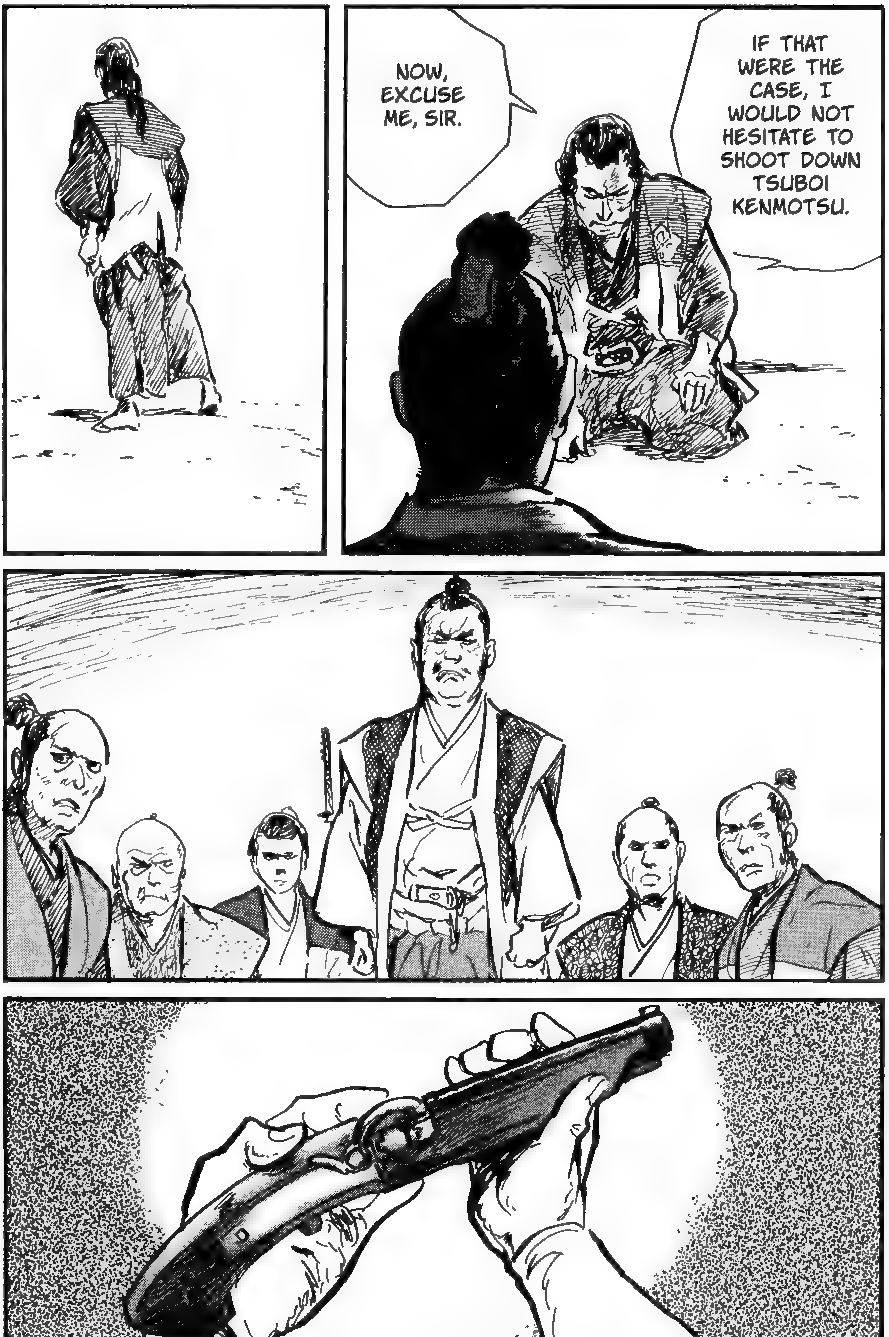
BYU
TUK!
KPOW

E...
EXCELLENT,
MITSUHIDE!!

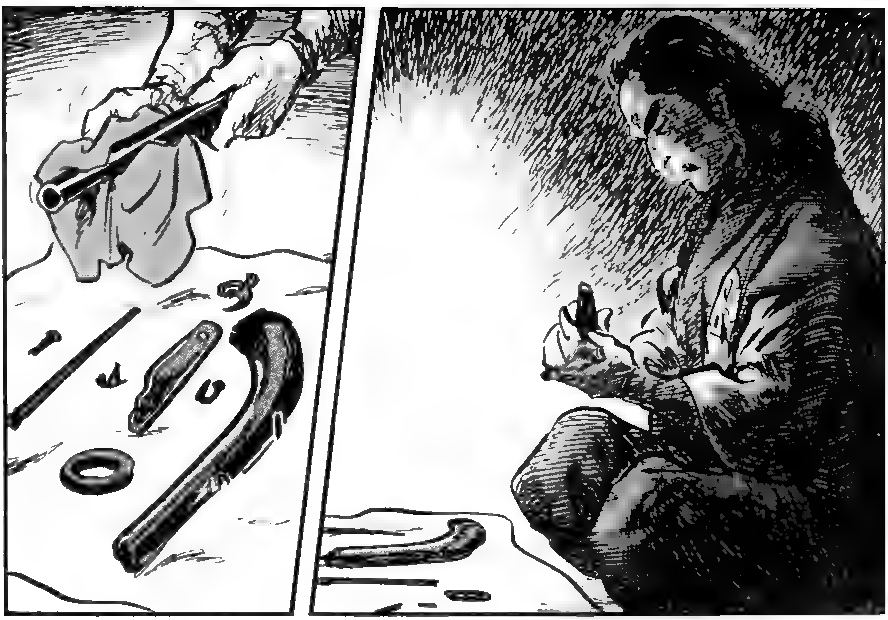
MMM. I APPOINT YOU! I GIVE YOU A HUNDRED *SAMURAI* AND MAKE YOU THE HEAD OF OUR MUSKET COMPANY!
YOU HAVE ASTOUNDING SKILL!
?!
JUST ONE MOMENT PLEASE
AND I HAVE A FAVOR--
PLEASE PROCEED NOW.

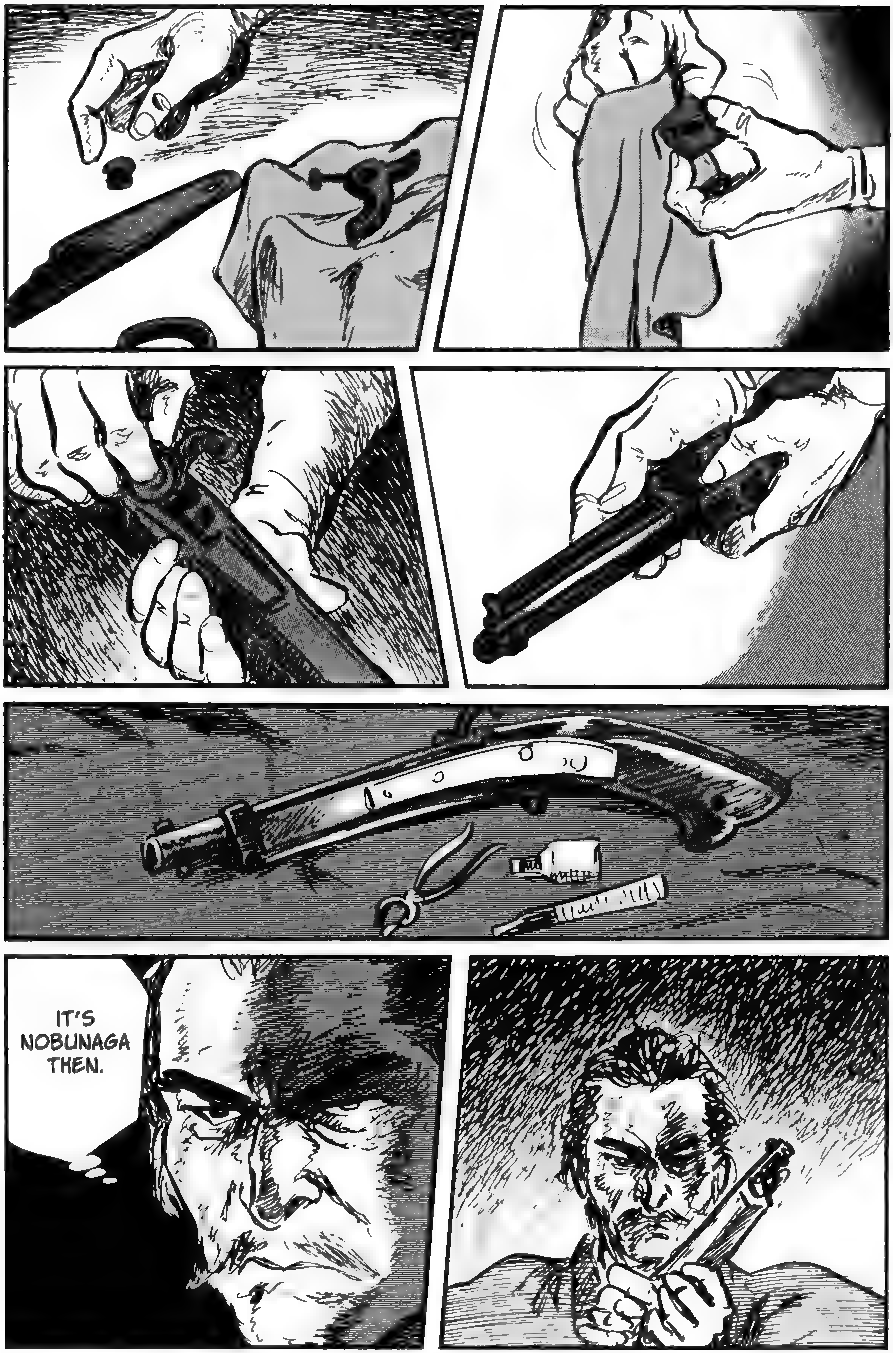
I'M TALKING ABOUT TSUBOI KENMOTSU, THE LEADER OF THE IKKŌ-IKKI!
THERE'S A MAN I WANT YOU TO SHOOT.
坪井監物を
撃て
KILL TSUBOI KENMOTSU.
WHAT?!
I MUST REFUSE, SIR.

WHEN YOU SAID YOU'D GIVE ME A MERE HUNDRED MEN, I WAS IRATE, AND IT WAS IN SUCH ANGER THAT I SHOWED OFF. BUT I ALREADY KNEW THE CONSEQUENCE, THAT YOU'D ORDER ME TO ASSASSINATE TSUBOI KENMOTSU.
I AM ASHAMED THAT I DISPLAYED MY GUNMANSHIP.
LATER, I WOULD BECOME AN OBJECT OF ENVY TO EVERYONE AROUND ME. OUT OF JEALOUSY, ALL ASAKURA MEN WOULD LOATHE THAT I GAINED MY POSITION BY SHOOTING AN ENEMY GENERAL!
IF YOU BECOME MY VASSAL, THIS IS WHAT'S EXPECTED OF YOU. WHY SHOULD YOU THINK TWICE ABOUT IT?
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT!
IF YOU WOULD ENTRUST YOUR ENTIRE ARMY TO ME, IF YOU WOULD PUT ME IN COMMAND OF ALL *SAMURAI*...THEN I'D BE IN POSITION TO RULE WELL. I COULD SUPPRESS ANY AND ALL JEALOUSY.
I MAY WIN YOUR FAVOR, MILORD, BUT EVERY TIME I RISE IN STATUS, OTHERS WOULD FROWN.

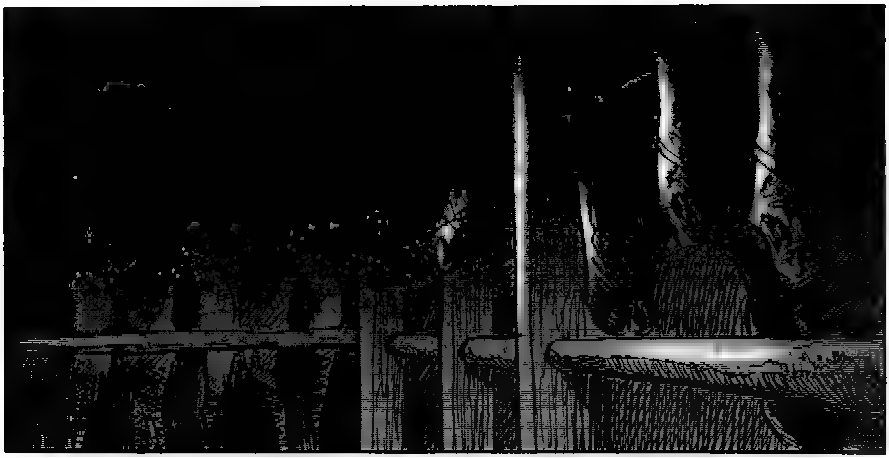

NOW, EXCUSE ME, SIR.
IF THAT WERE THE CASE, I WOULD NOT HESITATE TO SHOOT DOWN TSUBOI KENMOTSU.

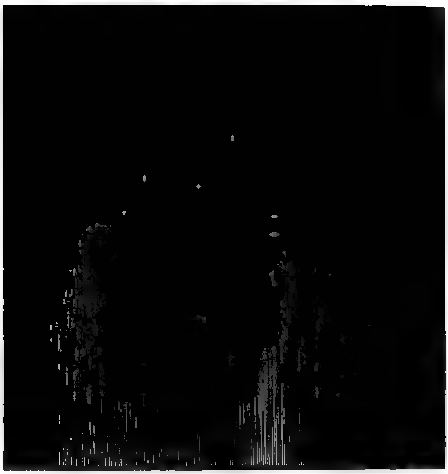
IT'S NOBUNAGA THEN.
ASAKURA YOSHIKAGE. HE MAY BE VALIANT, BUT HE IS NARROWMINDED. MOST LIKELY, HE'LL NEVER LEAVE ECHIZEN.
THAT'S WHY HE DESERTED HIS WIFE AND LEFT MING. EVEN WHEN SHE DIED OF ILLNESS, HE DID NOT RETURN. NOT ONLY THAT, HER DEATH DIDN'T SADDEN HIM. HE ALWAYS STARED OUT AT THE WORLD FROM THE DARK. INDEED, HE WAS A HERO WITH OWL'S EYES.
HE WAS A MAN WHO SOUGHT PERFECTION. HE WAS ALSO A VERY PROUD AND UNFORTUNATE MAN, WHO WAS TOO SELF-CONSCIOUS OF BEING SPECIAL.




IT'S NOBUNAGA THEN.

INDEED, NOBUNAGA IS THE ONLY ONE.
A HOT-BLOODED MAN WITH AMBITION. A MAN WITH INSATIABLE DESIRE. A MAN NOW ON THE RISE...
A MAN WHO WILL DANCE IN THE PALM OF MY HAND.





SO THIS IS THE TSUKIKAGE HM

わ
WAHHH
ヒヒヒ

BU..!
HI
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HIIIN
GA
GA
GA
ARRGH!
STOP
HIM!
STOP
HIM!
BU
HI!
HI
HI
HI
I
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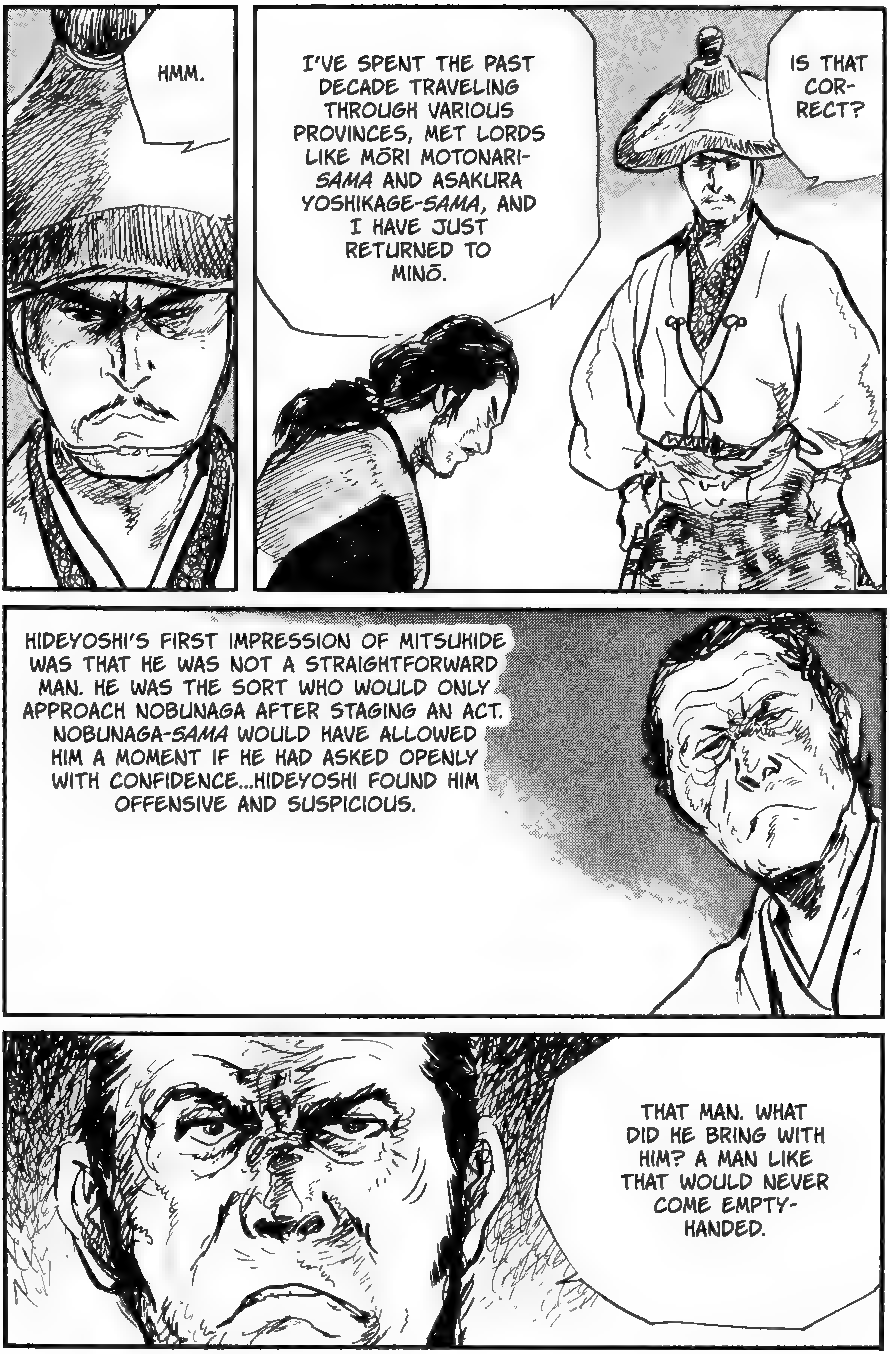
I
N
!

BOHIHIHIIN!
ぶるるるる!
ぶひひひん!
THAT'S A SUZU-SHINOBI TRICK.
WHO THE HELL SNUCK A BELL INTO TSUKIKAGE'S EAR...?!
WAS IT INTENDED TO HURT NOBUNAGA-SAMA? OR IS IT TO GAIN ACCESS TO HIM?
IF ANYONE JUMPS IN NOW AND SUBDUES TSUKIKAGE... THAT WOULD BE HIM...

MMM...
BU HI HI HI
HI

EXCEL-
LENT!
I WONDER IF YOU REMEMBER ME. I AM MITSUHIDE, THE SON OF MITSUTSUNA WHO SERVED SAITŌ DŌSAN-*SAMA*.
I AM AKECHI JŪBEI MITSUHIDE.
I DO NOT REMEMBER, BUT I AM FAMILIAR WITH THE AKECHI CLAN. IT'S A DISTINGUISHED FAMILY, DESCENDED FROM THE TOKI CLAN.
MMM.
I HAD THE HONOR OF AN AUDIENCE WITH YOU ONCE, NOBUNAGA-*DONO*.


HMM.
I'VE SPENT THE PAST DECADE TRAVELING THROUGH VARIOUS PROVINCES, MET LORDS LIKE MŌRI MOTONARI-*SAMA* AND ASAKURA YOSHIKAGE-*SAMA*, AND I HAVE JUST RETURNED TO MINŌ.
IS THAT CORRECT?
HIDEYOSHI'S FIRST IMPRESSION OF MITSUHIDE WAS THAT HE WAS NOT A STRAIGHTFORWARD MAN. HE WAS THE SORT WHO WOULD ONLY APPROACH NOBUNAGA AFTER STAGING AN ACT. NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* WOULD HAVE ALLOWED HIM A MOMENT IF HE HAD ASKED OPENLY WITH CONFIDENCE...HIDEYOSHI FOUND HIM OFFENSIVE AND SUSPICIOUS.
THAT MAN. WHAT DID HE BRING WITH HIM? A MAN LIKE THAT WOULD NEVER COME EMPTY-HANDED.

MMPF

はあ HAA
はあ HAA
GLUHH
GEHA
GEHA

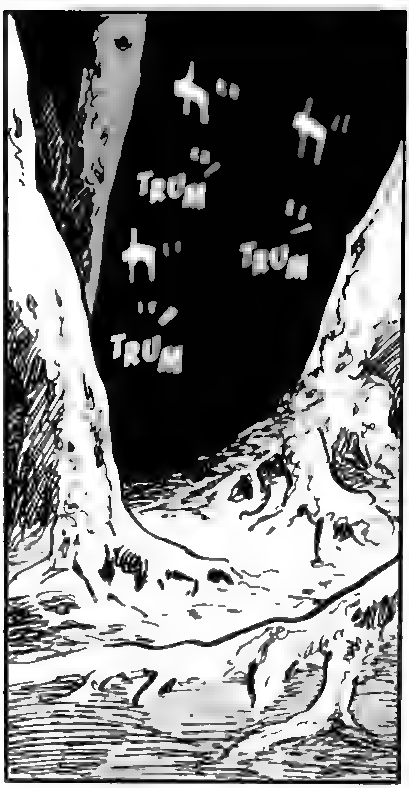
TAKENAKA-SAMA! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
OH NO!
OH... YOU ARE...

I'M GLAD YOU DIDN'T GET WORSE.
THANK YOU FOR TAKING CARE OF ME. I AM FEELING BETTER NOW.

I SENT MY MAN RACING OFF, SO WHO KNOWS. MY LORD, HIDEYOSHI-*SAMA*, MIGHT EVEN RUSH TO SEE YOU.
AND NUTRITIOUS FOOD, TOO.
A *KUSURIYU* BATH SHOULD BE DELIVERED BY TOMORROW.
YES?
HACHISUKA-*DONO*.
HMMM. I GUESS I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO TELL THE TRUTH.
WHY WERE YOU HERE? IN A PLACE LIKE THIS? IT MAKES NO SENSE TO ME...

WHA... WHAT!!
AS A MATTER OF FACT, TAKENAKA-SAMA, I'VE BEEN UNDER MILORD'S ORDERS TO WATCH OVER YOU FOR SOME TIME NOW.
EVER SINCE WE WON THE SURRENDER OF INABAYAMA, WE'VE HIDDEN IN THE WOODS OF MIZUSAWA BEHIND THIS PLACE AND KEPT WATCH DAY AND NIGHT, TWO MEN TAKING TURNS.
NOTING THAT YOUR CONSTITUTION SEEMS WEAK, MILORD ORDERED ME TO KEEP AN EYE ON YOU.
HE CARES THAT MUCH ABOUT ME...
IS...IS THAT RIGHT?

PLEASE TAKE ME TO HIDEYOSHI-DONO! IMMEDIATELY!


TRUM
TRUM
TRUM

TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
OHH!
MILORD!!

TAKENAKA-DONO! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!
PLEASE PUT ME DOWN, HACHISUKA-DONO.

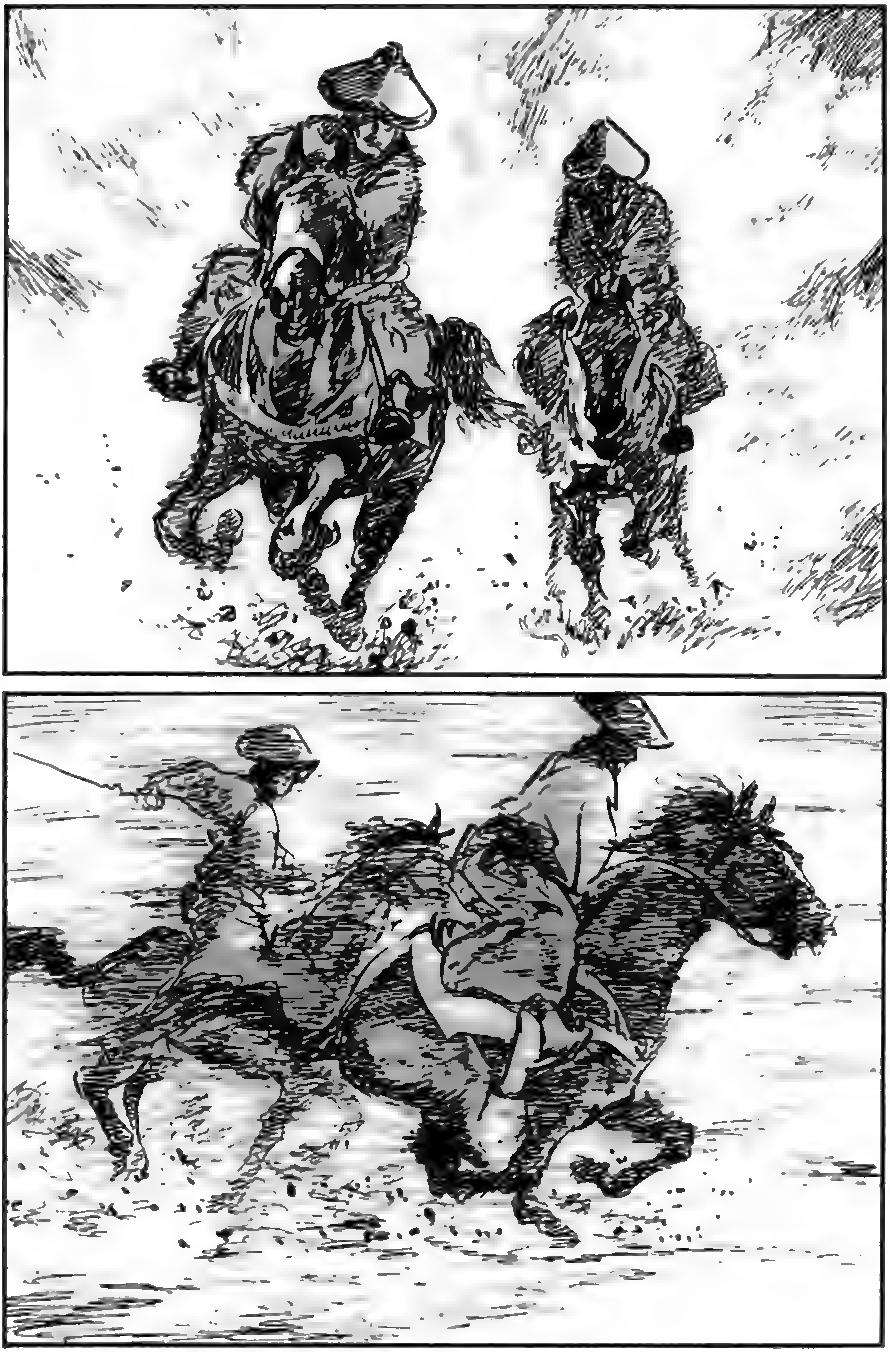
EVEN IF I AGREE TO SERVE YOU, I DO NOT KNOW HOW LONG MY LIFE WILL LAST. BUT AS LONG AS I LIVE, I, TAKENAKA HANBEI SHIGEHARU, WILL REVERE YOU, HIDEYOSHI-*DONO*, AS MY LORD.
THEY SAY A *SAMURAI* WILL DIE FOR A MAN WHO KNOWS HIM.
WAHH!
OH... OH... OHH...
WAHHHHHHH

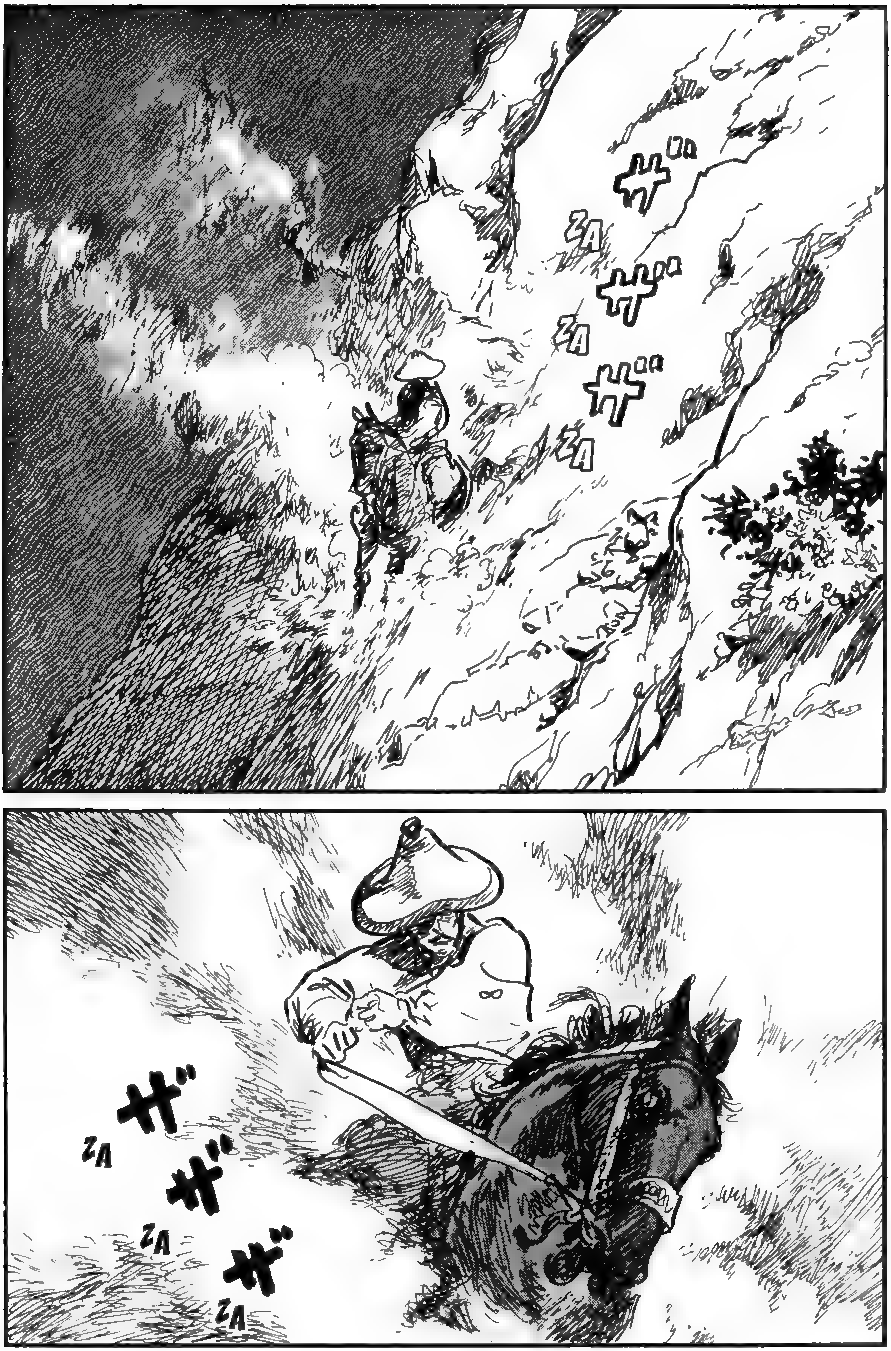
WAAHHH
WAAHHH

HIDEYOSHI WAS TOUCHED BY HANBEI'S CHARACTER AND HANBEI WAS TOUCHED BY HIDEYOSHI'S WARMTH.
IT WAS THE FALLING OF THEIR TEARS THAT COMMUNICATED THEIR EMOTION BETTER THAN A THOUSAND WORDS.
TAKENAKA HANBEI SHIGEHARU WAS FORMERLY THE GENERAL AND MASTER STRATEGIST OF MINŌ AND WAS SAID TO EQUAL ZHUGE LIANG KONGMING.
HIDEYOSHI COULD NOT UTTER ONE SENTENCE. HANBEI, TOO, COULD NOT FIND WORDS TO EXPRESS HOW HE FELT IN HIS HEART.
IEYASU MAY NEVER HAVE HAD ANY CHANCE TO TAKE CONTROL OF THE COUNTRY
THAT IF TAKENAKA HANBEI SHIGEHARU HAD SURVIVED AND DIRECTED THE TOYOTOMI CLAN EVEN AFTER HIDEYOSHI PASSED AWAY
I, THE AUTHOR, HAVE A FEELING...

...PROBABLY ASHIKAGA YOSHIAKI-SAMA'S...
THE GIFT THE MAN NAMED AKECHI JŪBEI MITSUHIDE BROUGHT FOR NOBUNAGA-SAMA IS...
...SECRET LETTER. FROM WHAT I HEAR, YOSHIAKI-SAMA IS CURRENTLY LIVING UNDER THE PROTECTION OF ASAKURA OF ECHIZEN.

THAT'S IT!!
NOT ONLY THAT, HOSOKAWA FUJITAKA, WHO IS WELL-KNOWN FOR HIS SHREWDNESS, IS WITH YOSHIAKI-SAMA.
HE BROUGHT THE SHOGUN WITH HIM.
I SEE. THAT MAN, AKECHI...
THE SHOGUN IS ON THE MOVE, I BELIEVE.
THE SHOGUN!




ZA
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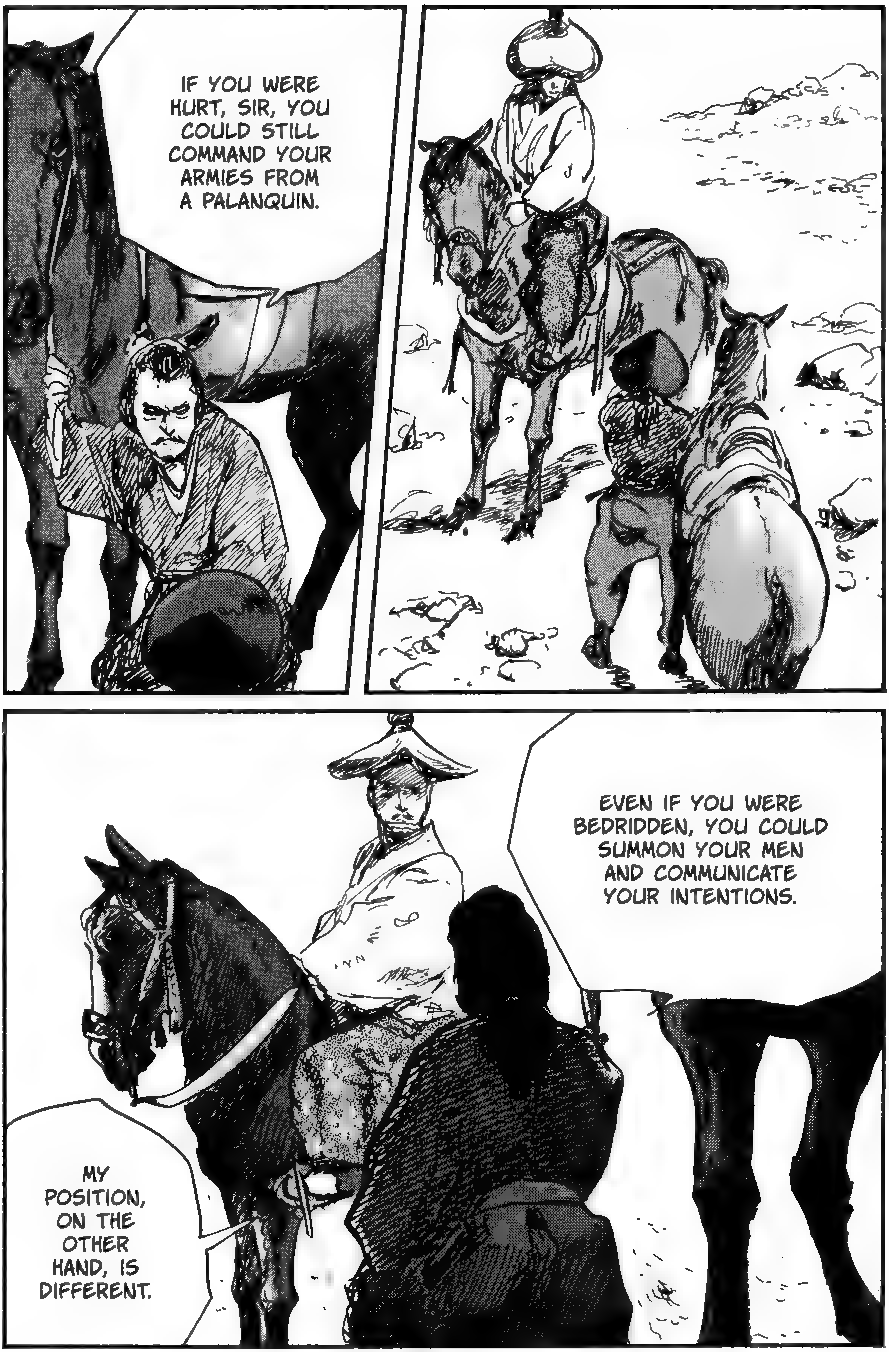
ZA

THERE'S STILL A RISK, NO MATTER HOW SLIGHT.
MITSUHIDE. I DON'T DOUBT YOUR HORSEMANSHIP, BUT WHY?
MMG...
BESIDES, THIS HORSE ISN'T MINE.
IF I'M INJURED, I WON'T BE ABLE TO WORK. SO IN A PLACE LIKE THIS, I THINK IT'S BETTER TO DISMOUNT AND DESCEND ON FOOT.

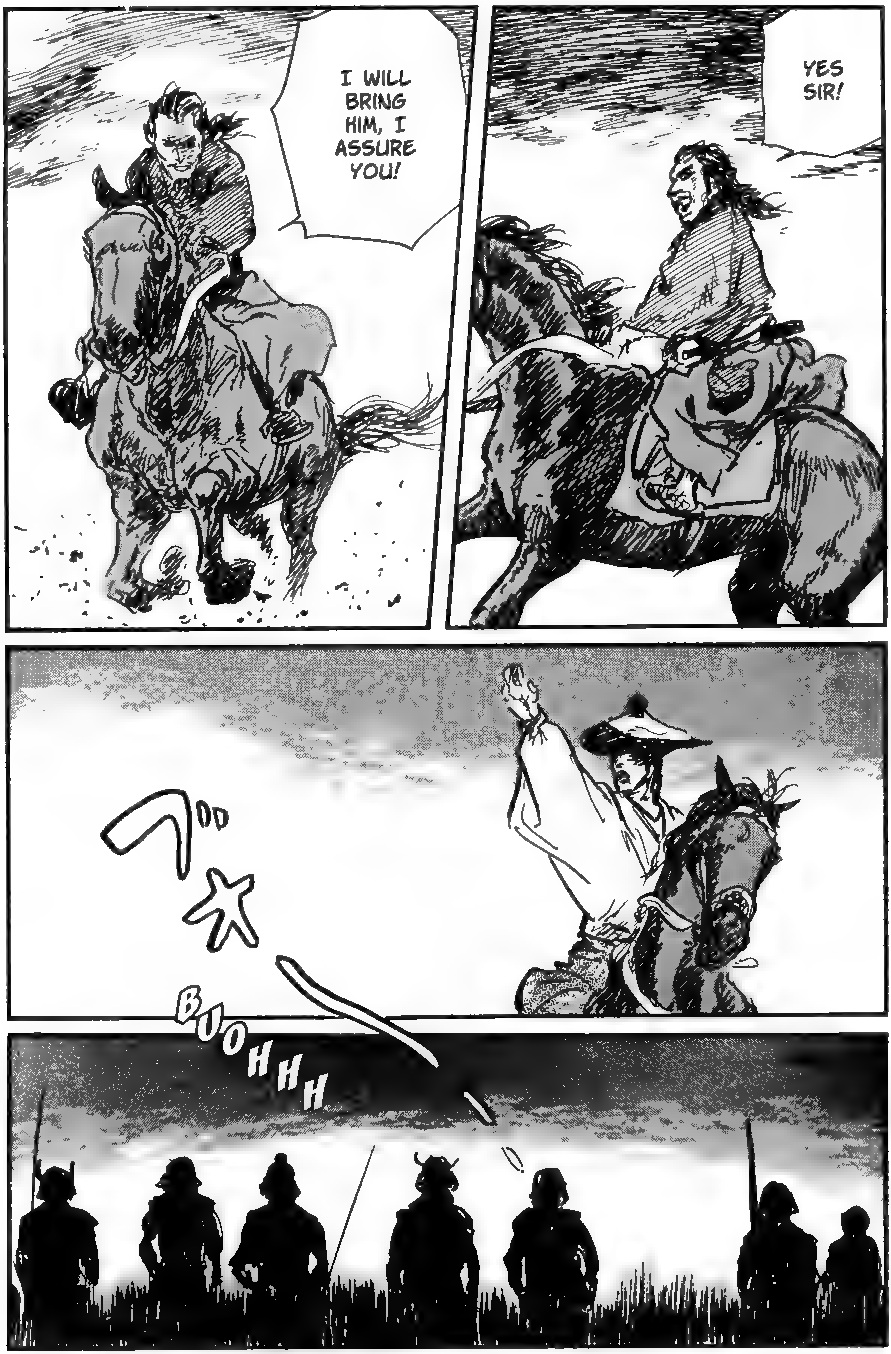
ALSO, I WAS CONFIDENT. IN ANY CASE, I WAS WORRIED THAT THE HORSE MIGHT TRAMPLE SOMEONE.
I THOUGHT IT WAS WORTH THE TROUBLE.
ESPECIALLY IF YOU THINK IT'S FOOLISH TO TAKE THE RISK!!
THEN WHY DID YOU TAME TSUKIKAGE WHEN HE RAN WILD?!
ARE YOU CALLING ME A DOG?!!
EXCEPT PERSONAL PLEASURE, PERHAPS.
BUT TO SIMPLY COME CHARGING DOWN THIS SLOPE IS THE RECKLESS COURAGE OF A DOG. I DIDN'T SEE ANY VALUE IN IT.


IF YOU WERE HURT, SIR, YOU COULD STILL COMMAND YOUR ARMIES FROM A PALANQUIN.
EVEN IF YOU WERE BEDRIDDEN, YOU COULD SUMMON YOUR MEN AND COMMUNICATE YOUR INTENTIONS.
MY POSITION, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS DIFFERENT.

IF I WERE, I'D FOLLOW YOU WITH ALL MY MIGHT TO ENSURE YOUR SAFETY FROM EVERY DANGER.
BESIDES, I AM NOT YOUR VASSAL, SIR.
WHAT IF I AM INJURED AND FIND MYSELF UNABLE TO MOVE? WHO WOULD COME TO MY SIDE?
EVERY WORD YOU UTTER WEIGHS ON ME.
AND BECAUSE OF THAT, IT LEAVES A HEAVY IMPRESSION IN MY HEART.
WHEN I SAID IT WAS THE RECKLESS COURAGE OF A DOG TO GALLOP DOWN A HILL LIKE THIS, I MEANT FOR A MAN IN MY POSITION.

KAKKEI-SAMA, THE FORMER MONSHU OF NANTO ICHIJŌIN, IS STAYING IN ECHIZEN RIGHT NOW.
DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY? IF YOU HAVE AN AXE TO GRIND, SPEAK.
HE GOES BY THE NAME OF ASHIKAGA YOSHIAKI-SAMA OUTSIDE HIS PRIESTHOOD.
HIS VASSAL, HOSOKAWA FUJITAKA-DONO, AND I ARE ON INTIMATE TERMS.
MMM!

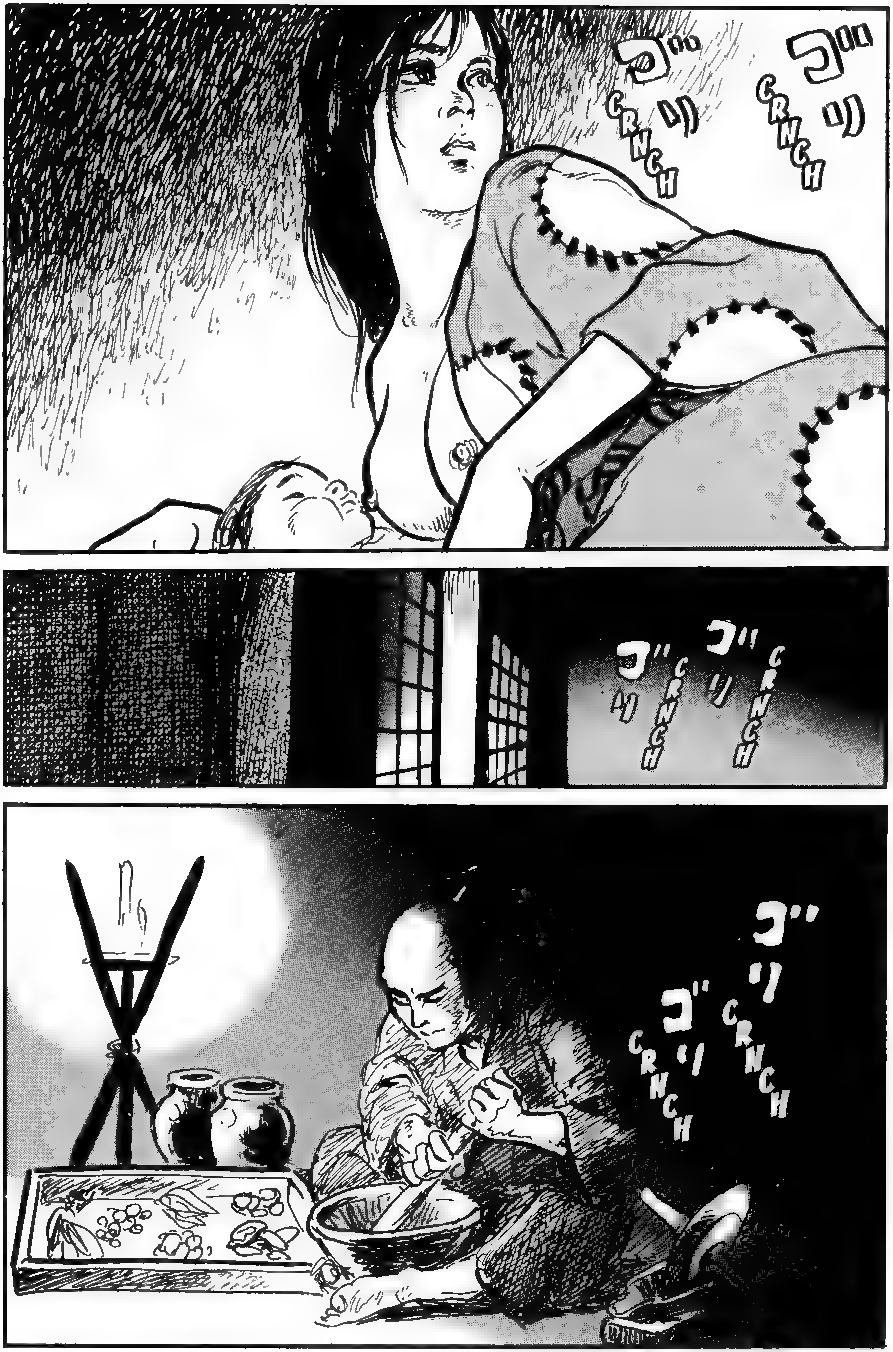
THUS, I SUSPECT YOSHIAKI-SAMA IS COUNTING ON TAKEDA SHINGEN-SAMA OF KAI FOR SUPPORT.
FURTHERMORE, IF I MAY, ASAKURA YOSHIKAGE-SAMA HAS NO INTENTION OF MARCHING ON THE CAPITAL.
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
SLAP
CAN YOU DO THAT?!
MITSUHIDE!! BRING YOSHIAKI-DONO TO MINŌ!!


I WILL BRING HIM, I ASSURE YOU!
YES SIR!
BUOHHH

BE MY VASSAL! I'LL GIVE YOU TEN THOUSAND MEN!
BUT YOU BROUGHT THE SHOGUN WITH YOU!

THINKING YOU MIGHT BE AN ASSASSIN!
MITSUHIDE! I WAS TESTING YOU ON THE HILL THIS MORNING.
HA HA HA HA

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA. AFTER INSTALLING YOSHIAKI, I'LL GO TO THE CENTER AND SEIZE CONTROL OF THE NATION!
HA HA HA HA HA HA.
YES, MILORD! THANK YOU! I'M GRATEFUL, SIR!
MY GOAL IS IN MY GRIP.


CRNCH
CRNCH
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CRNCH
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CRNCH
CRNCH

CRNCH
CRNCH
JAPANESE PEPPER, WILD GINGER, SILER ROOT, BALLOON FLOWER ROOT, KANKYŌ GINGER, CINNAMON, BYAKUJUTSU.
WHAT IS IT?
HANBI.
AND THAT.

I SPENT MORE THAN TEN DAYS COLLECTING THIS MUCH.
YOU'RE MAKING THE SHINOBI POWDER OF VIRILITY!
VIPER...
CRUNCH
CRUNCH

WHA...
?
hmp
AND IT'S BEEN MORE THAN TWENTY DAYS... SINCE WE MADE LOVE... SO MAYBE...
WELL, LOOK, YOU'RE CONCOCTING A VIRILITY POWDER.
WHAT ARE YOU... DOING ?!
YOU SILLY! I'M PREPARING IT FOR OUR LORD. IT'S NOT FOR ME.

YOU THOUGHT I MIGHT'VE BECOME IMPOTENT! YOU WERE SO WORRIED YOU TRIED TO SEDUCE ME! HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
IF YOU DON'T, NO SEX TONIGHT.
NO!
NOW DO THAT AGAIN.
HA HA HA HA HA. LET ME BEG YOU THEN.
IF IT'S TOMORROW OR THE DAY AFTER, I CAN GO WITHOUT FOREVER.
WHO CARES.

YOU ARE A PERVERT.
JUST ONCE, PLEASE!
SO PLEASE.
YOU KNOW, I'VE NEVER SEEN YOU DO THAT BEFORE.
JUST A LITTLE MORE.

UH...
あ AHH
あ AHHH

ああ
ああ
ああ
ああ
ああ
ああ
ああ
ああ

IT'S NOT THAT.
CAN'T MILORD MAKE LOVE ANYMORE?

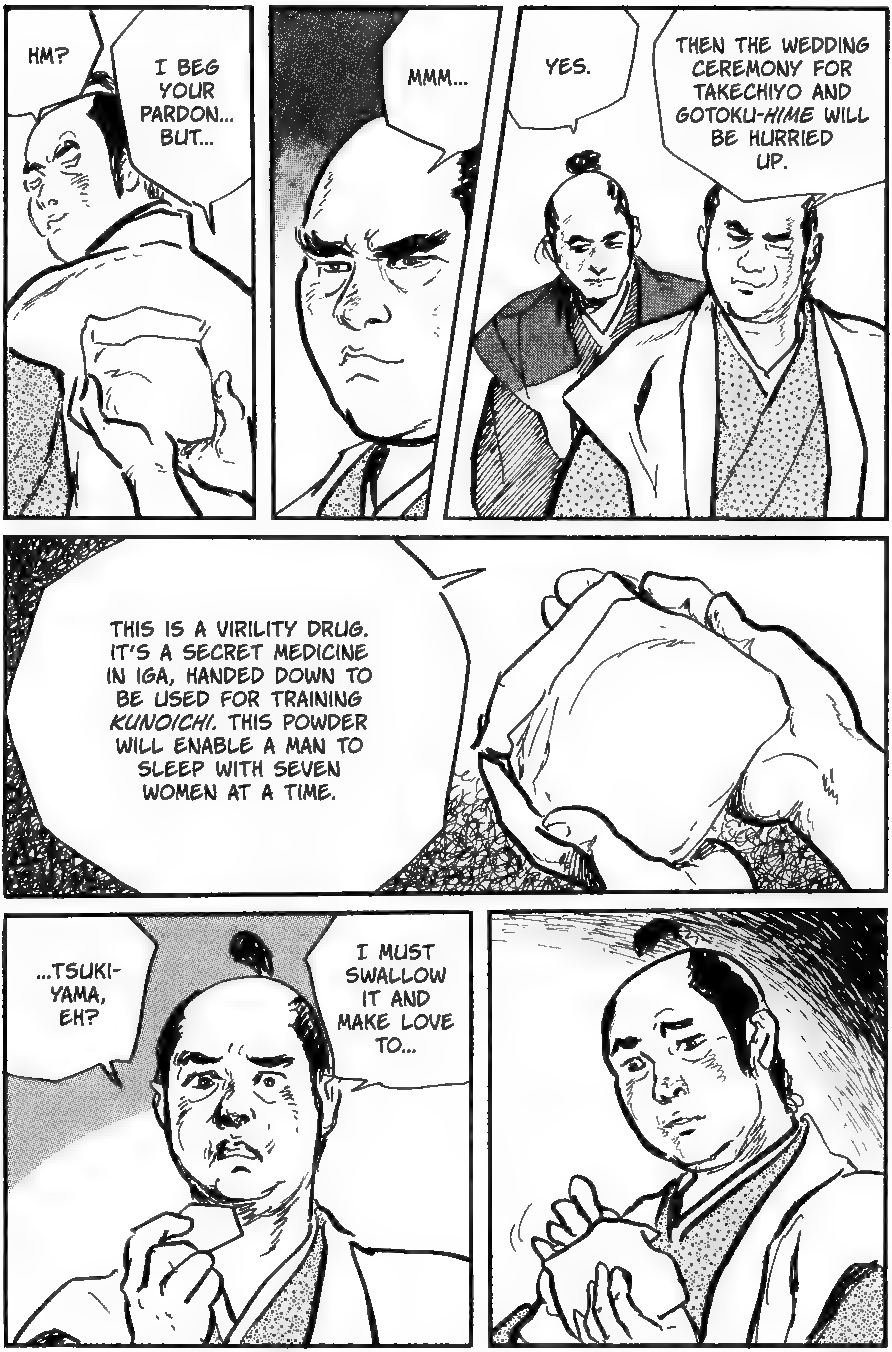
BUT THE WEDDING CEREMONY FOR TAKECHIYO-SAMA AND GOTOKU-SAMA HAS TO TAKE PLACE FIRST.
NOBUNAGA-SAMA WILL MAKE HIS MOVE ON THE CAPITAL. IT'S IMMINENT.

THIS IS THE ONLY WAY!
YOU SEE?
WE CANNOT HAVE ANYONE INTERFERE WITH THE CEREMONY! TSUKIYAMA-SAMA HAS TO BE UNDER CONTROL.

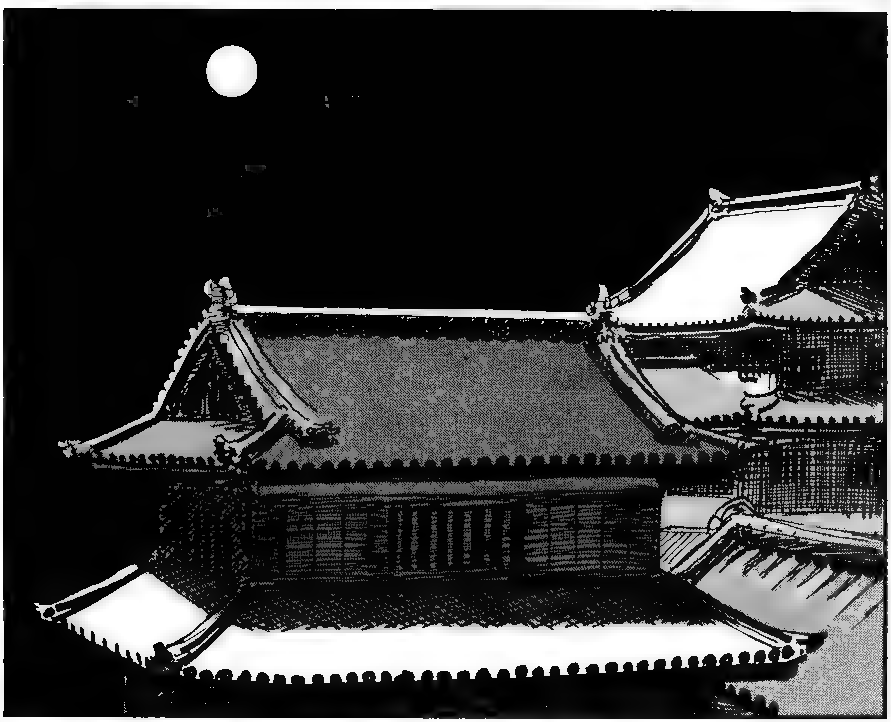
OH!!

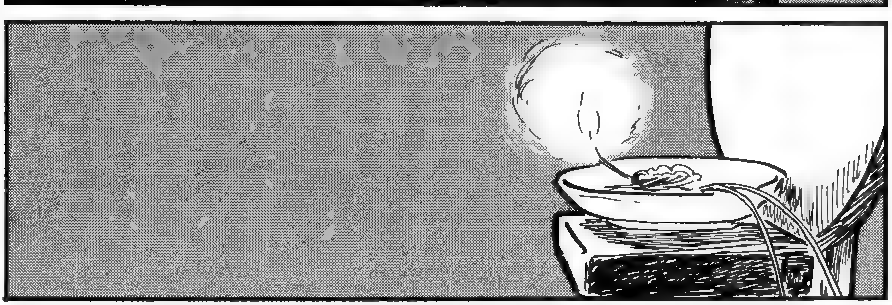
WHAT HAS THAT GOT TO DO WITH THE VIRILITY POWDER...?

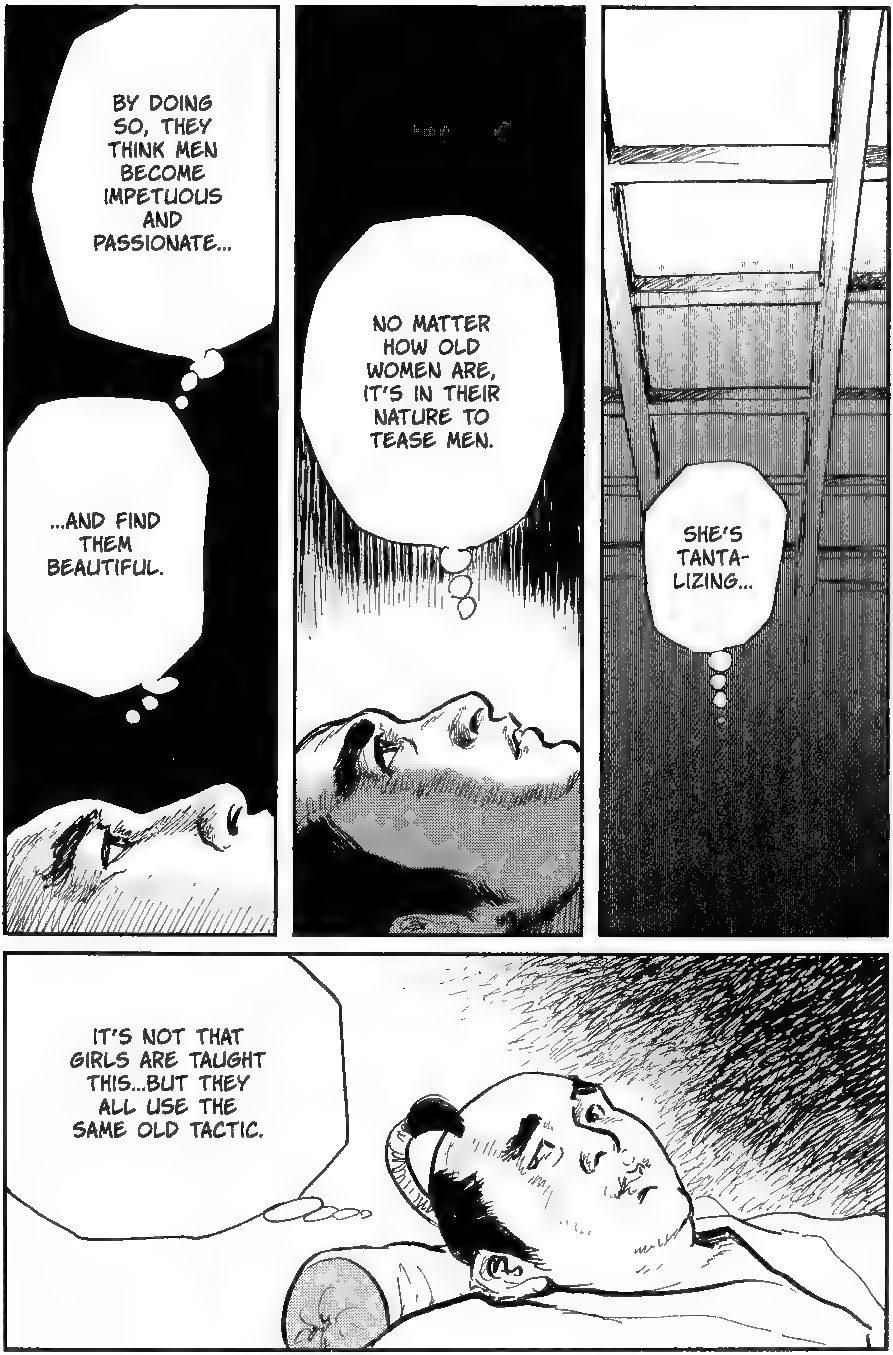
NOBUNAGA-SAMA HAS TAKEN IN A MAN NAMED AKECHI MITSUHIDE AND SENT HIM TO ASAKURA OF ECHIZEN.
AWW
THAT'S WHAT HIDEYOSHI-SAMA HAS TOLD US.
!
ECHIZEN IS WHERE ASHIKAGA YOSHIAKI-SAMA IS STAYING TEMPORARILY.


HM?
I BEG YOUR PARDON... BUT...
MMM...
YES.
THEN THE WEDDING CEREMONY FOR TAKECHIYO AND GOTOKU-*HIME* WILL BE HURRIED UP.
THIS IS A VIRILITY DRUG. IT'S A SECRET MEDICINE IN IGA, HANDED DOWN TO BE USED FOR TRAINING *KUNOICHI*. THIS POWDER WILL ENABLE A MAN TO SLEEP WITH SEVEN WOMEN AT A TIME.
...TSUKI-YAMA, EH?
I MUST SWALLOW IT AND MAKE LOVE TO...

NO CHOICE... I GUESS.
URK...






BY DOING SO, THEY THINK MEN BECOME IMPETUOUS AND PASSIONATE...
...AND FIND THEM BEAUTIFUL.
NO MATTER HOW OLD WOMEN ARE, IT'S IN THEIR NATURE TO TEASE MEN.
SHE'S TANTA-LIZING...
IT'S NOT THAT GIRLS ARE TAUGHT THIS...BUT THEY ALL USE THE SAME OLD TACTIC.

I'M BORED...
IT'S THE WRONG MOVE, BUT EVERY WOMAN, NOT JUST TSUKIYAMA, FAILS TO REALIZE IT DOESN'T WORK. HOW I PITY THEM FOR THAT.
ONCE SHE GETS GOING, SHE DOESN'T KNOW WHEN TO END. I, ON THE OTHER HAND, BECOME SO TIRED THAT I AM EVEN LESS EXCITED.
I'M BORED WITH TSUKIYAMA'S BODY...IT TAKES TOO LONG. SHE NEVER GETS ENOUGH.
YAWWW
THAT POWDER HANZŌ GAVE ME ISN'T WORKING...

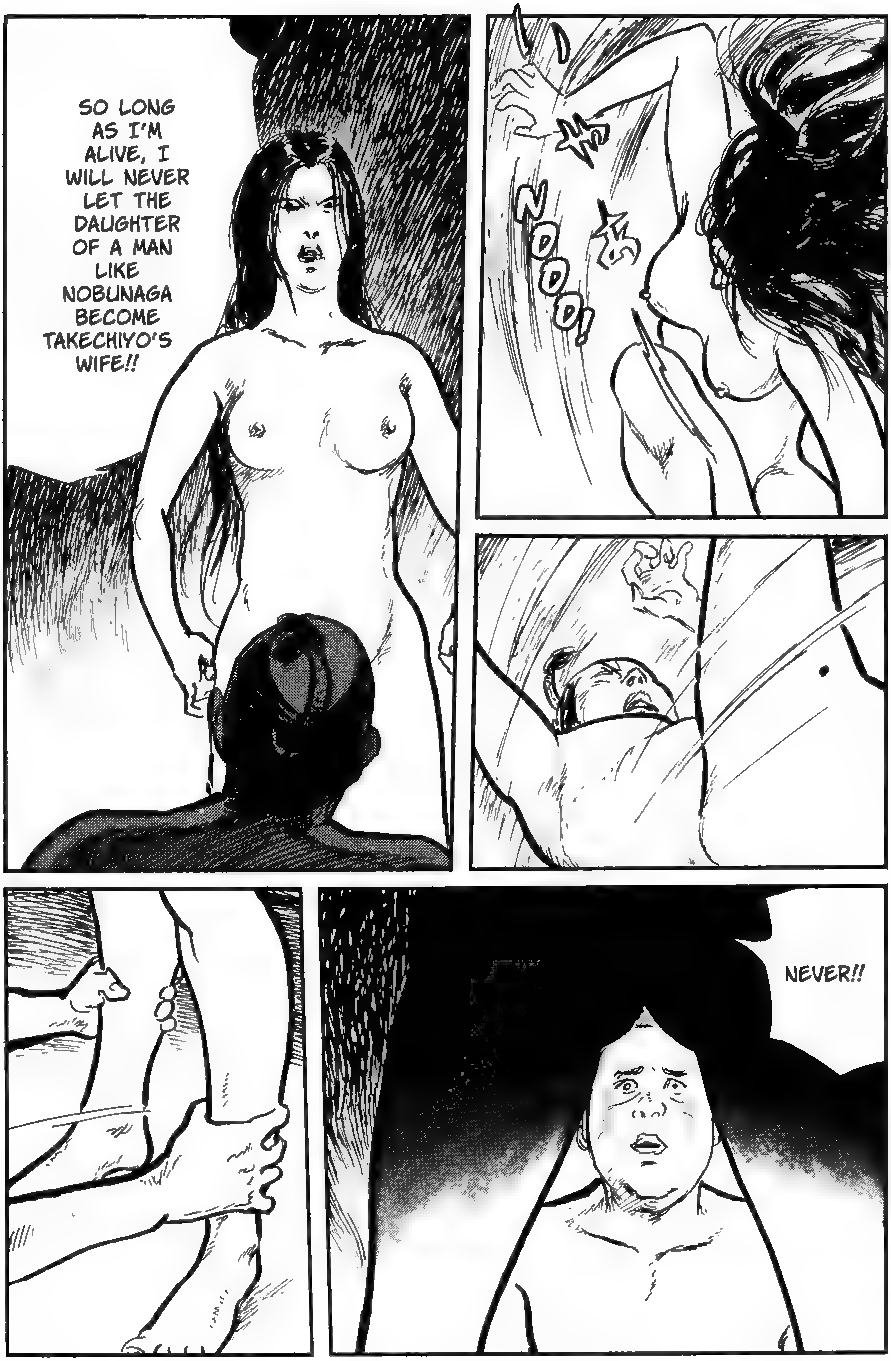
I WILL, AFTER WE'RE DONE.
ARE YOU FALLING ASLEEP ALREADY?!
IF YOU'RE TIRED, JUST GO AHEAD AND SLEEP.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO FORCE YOURSELF TO DO THIS.
WHAT?
THE SAME OLD TACTIC AGAIN.

COME HERE.
ER...NO... NOTHING...
AHHH
AHHH

WHO KNOWS IF SHE COULD EVER BE SATIATED.
HAHAHA
SO LONG...
AND BECAUSE SHE CAN'T EXPERIENCE TRUE ORGASM, SHE REMAINS UNSATISFIED, WHICH KEEPS HER GOING FOREVER.
THIS BODY OF HERS DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO BURST IN CLIMAX AND REACH AN END...
HER EXCITEMENT RISES AND CALMS. UP AND DOWN. UP AND DOWN. LIKE THE WAVES...
AH AHHH
OOO
SOME-HOW...
AHHH
OOO

I MUST FINISH HER SOMEHOW...
HAHAHAHA
AAHHH
HANZŌ'S MEDICINE IS BEGINNING TO KICK IN. THAT'S WHY I CAN KEEP GOING...
THERE!
THERE!
BUT ISN'T SHE DONE YET?
NOT YET...?

I HEAR NOBUNAGA-*DONO* IS FINALLY MOVING HIS ARMY, HEADING FOR THE CAPITAL. THAT MEANS, OBVIOUSLY, THE WEDDING CEREMONY FOR TAKECHIYO AND GOTOKU-*HIME* WILL BE HELD SOON.
I HOPE YOU WILL ACCEPT IT, AND ENDURE.
I HAVE A FEELING AN ENVOY MIGHT EVEN BE HERE TOMORROW.


SO LONG AS I'M ALIVE, I WILL NEVER LET THE DAUGHTER OF A MAN LIKE NOBUNAGA BECOME TAKECHIYO'S WIFE!!
NOOO!
NEVER!!

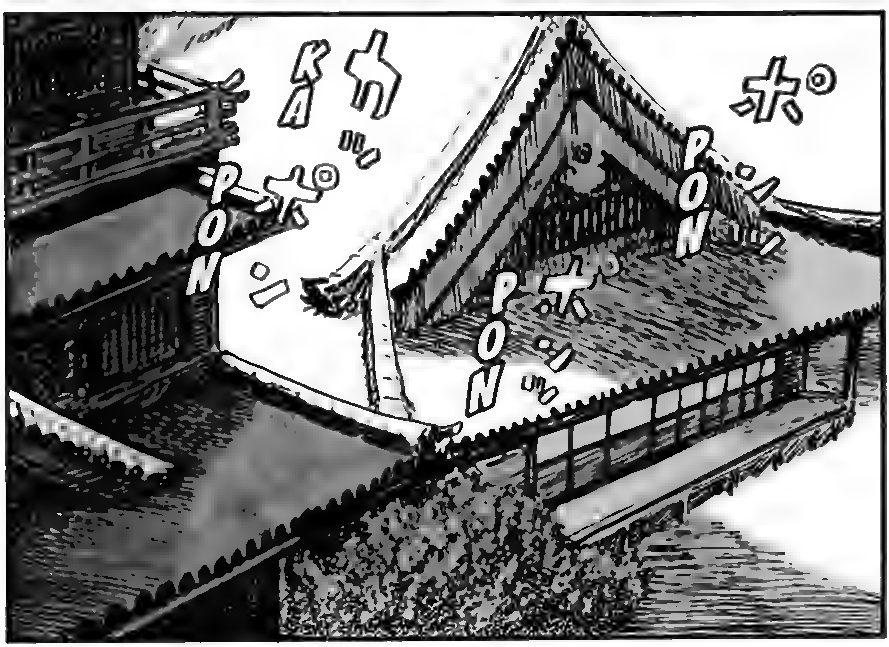
I JUST HAD AN IDEA...
AW!
IT MIGHT BE AMUSING TO ACT LIKE A BEAST.
WHA... WHAT...
AHH!
D...DON'T DO...SUCH... SUCH A THING...

AHHHH
AHHHH
AHHHH
AS HE BURIED HIS FACE BETWEEN TSUKIYAMA'S THIGHS AND LAPPED UP THE WOMAN HERSELF, IEYASU CHUCKLED TO HIMSELF. HE HAD HER NOW.
NOTHING COULD GRATIFY A PROUD WOMAN LIKE HER BETTER THAN THIS, HE THOUGHT.
AND HE WONDERED WHY HE'D NEVER THOUGHT OF IT BEFORE.
AHHHH
AHHHH
AHHHH

AHH.
AHH.
GOOD.
IT'S
GOOD.
DARLING!
UHHH.
A
LITTLE
MORE!
AHHH.
JUST
A
LITTLE
MORE!!

REMEMBER THE MUNECHIKA, WHICH YOSHIMOTO-SAMA GAVE ME? LET'S HAVE TAKECHIYO WEAR IT AS HIS MAMORIGATANA DURING HIS WEDDING.
LET ME DO THAT AGAIN.
UHHH.
D... DARLING... YOU...YOU ARE A KYŌYŪ...

PON
KA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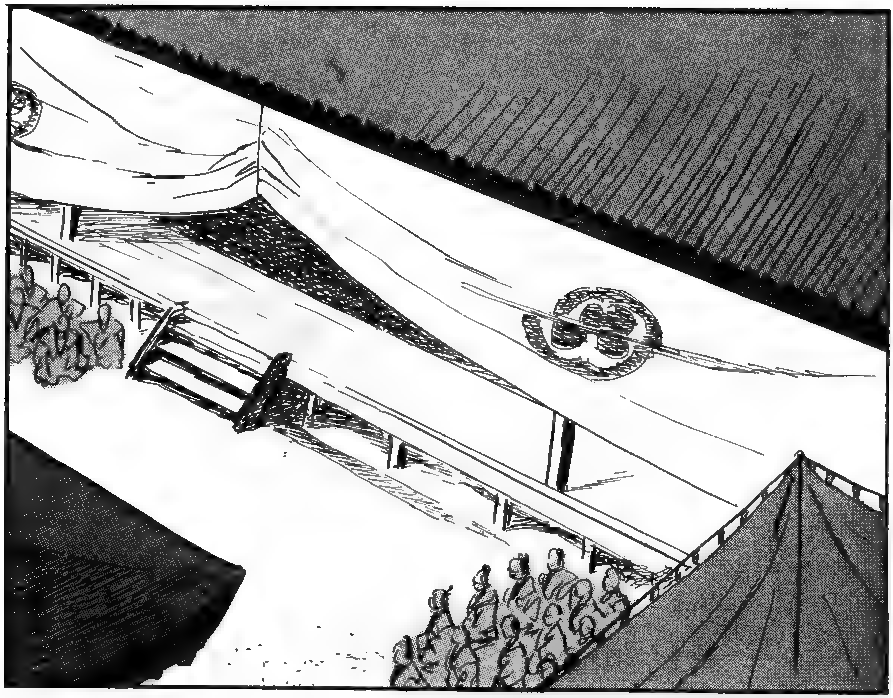

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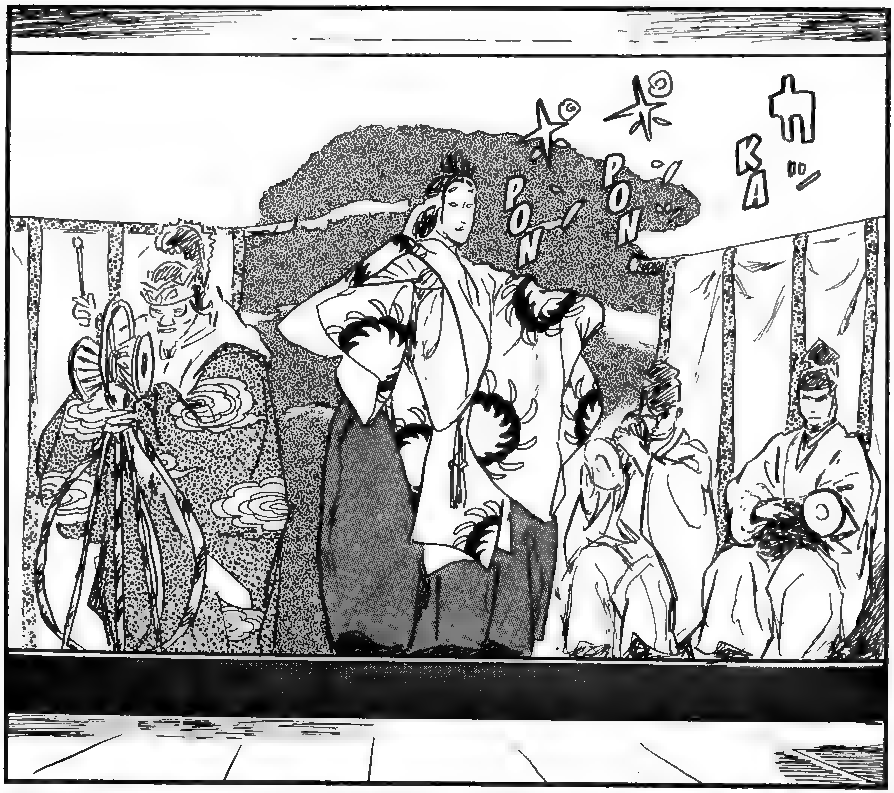
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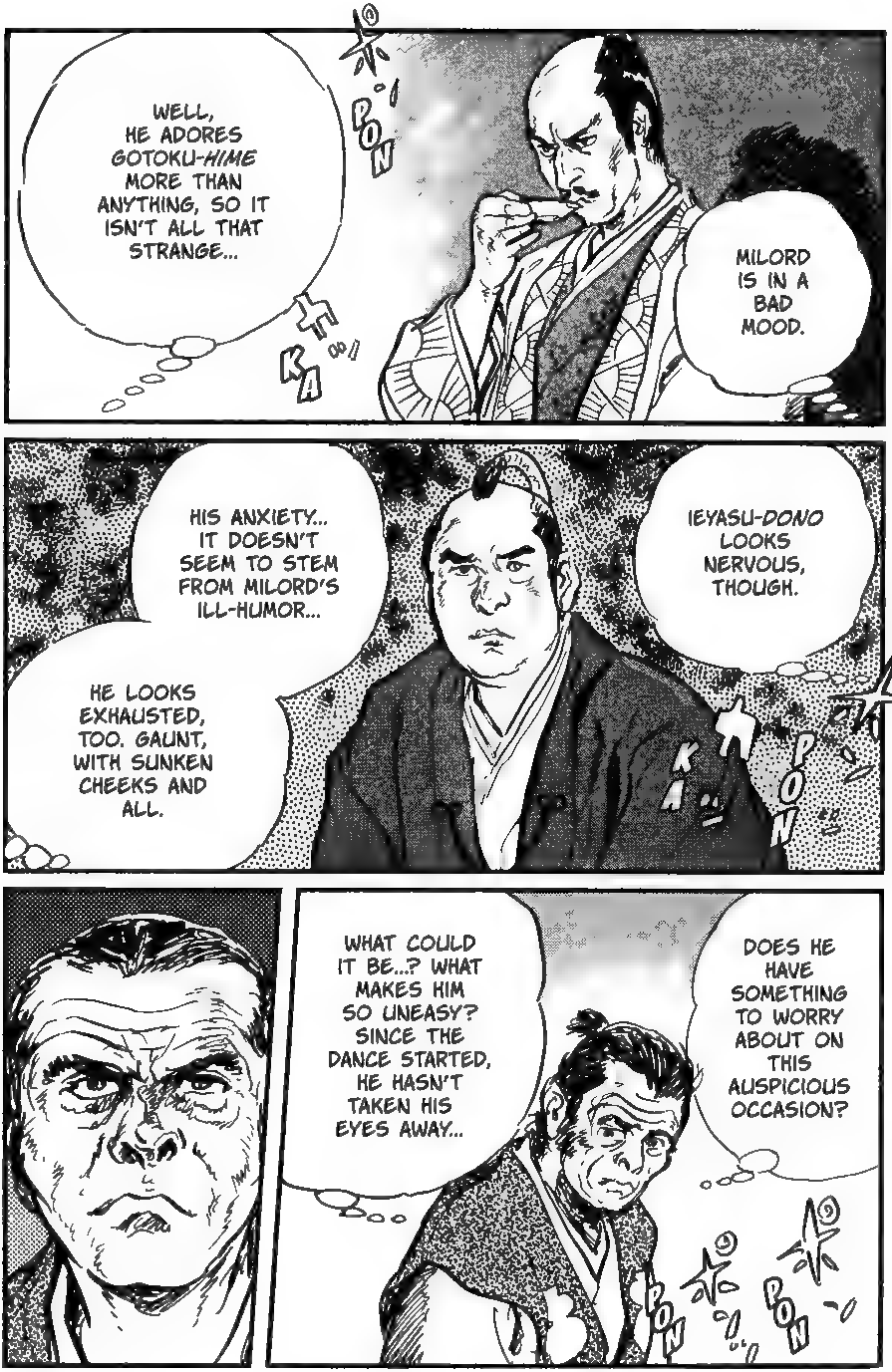
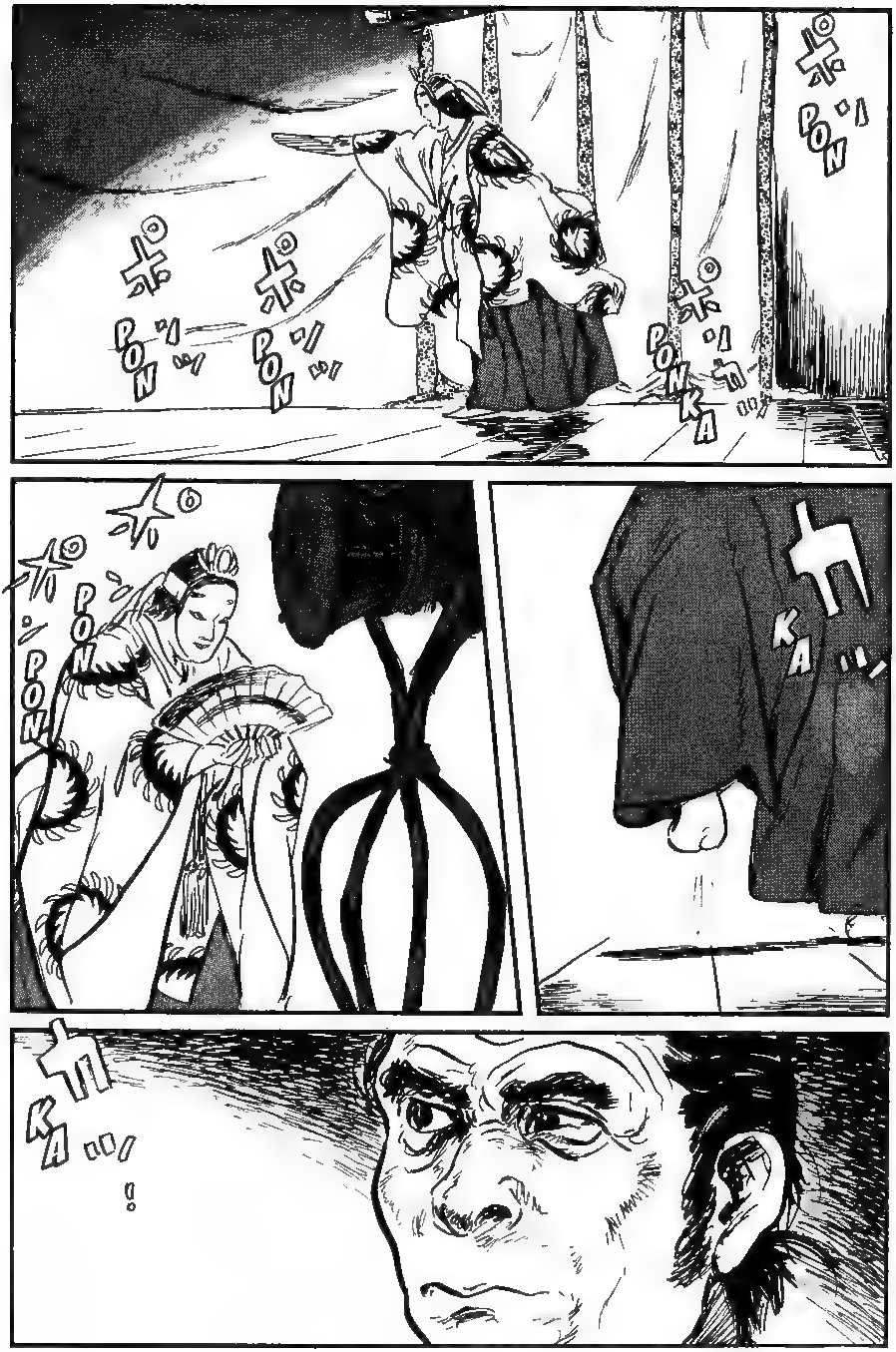

MILORD IS IN A BAD MOOD.
WELL, HE ADORES GOTOKU-*HIME* MORE THAN ANYTHING, SO IT ISN'T ALL THAT STRANGE...
IEYASU-*DONO* LOOKS NERVOUS, THOUGH.
HIS ANXIETY... IT DOESN'T SEEM TO STEM FROM MILORD'S ILL-HUMOR...
HE LOOKS EXHAUSTED, TOO. GAUNT, WITH SUNKEN CHEEKS AND ALL.
DOES HE HAVE SOMETHING TO WORRY ABOUT ON THIS AUSPICIOUS OCCASION?
WHAT COULD IT BE...? WHAT MAKES HIM SO UNEASY? SINCE THE DANCE STARTED, HE HASN'T TAKEN HIS EYES AWAY...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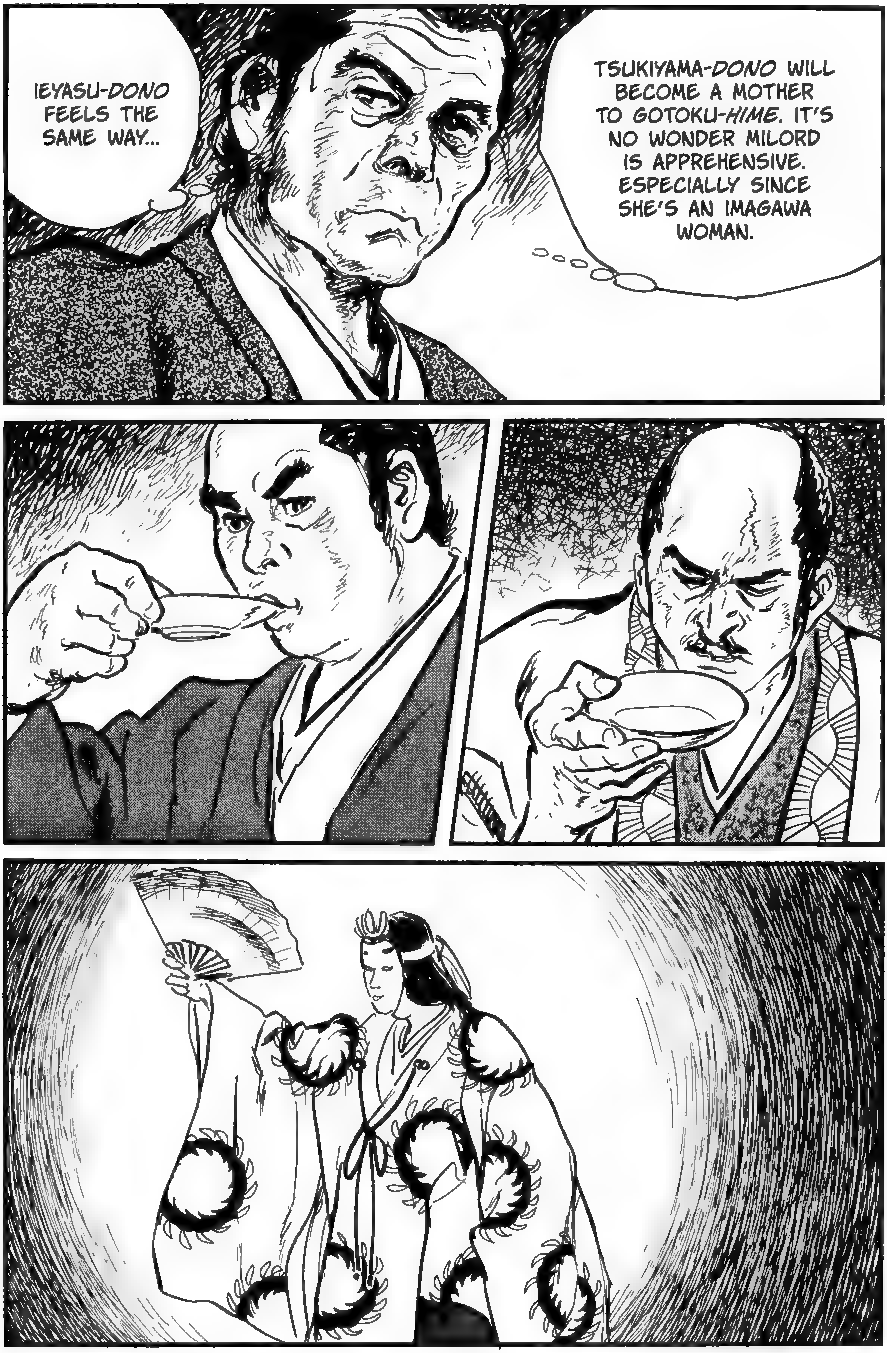
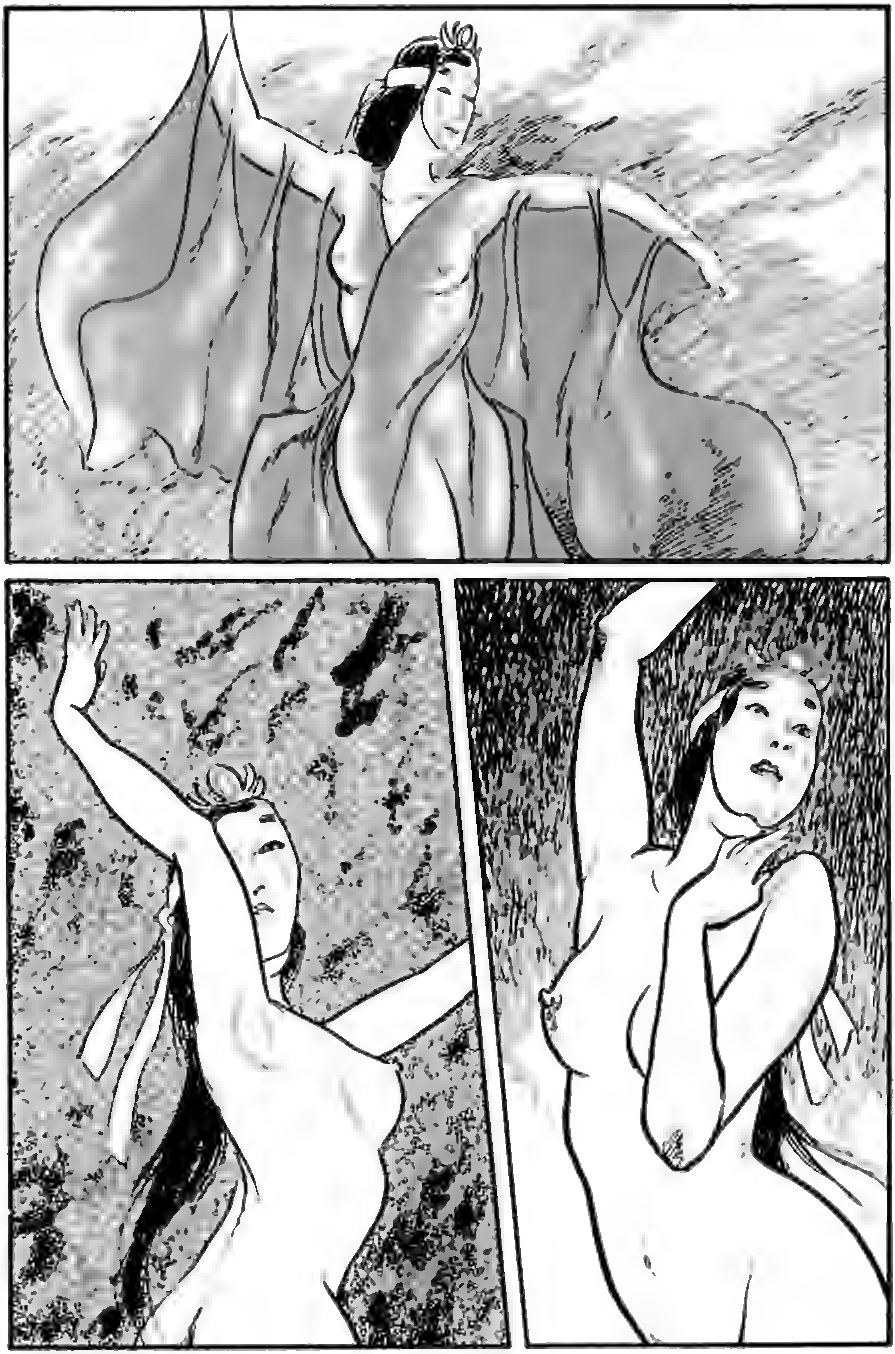
IT'S A LUCKY DAY TOO, WITH CLEAR SKIES.
A NICE COUPLE.
THEY BOTH HAVE THAT FAULTLESS DIGNITY.
AND IEYASU-*DONO* IS NERVOUS.
MILORD IS CROSS.
OF COURSE THEY ARE.
AH, I GOT IT! MILORD AND IEYASU-*SAMA* ARE BOTH WORRIED ABOUT TSUKIYAMA-*DONO*.

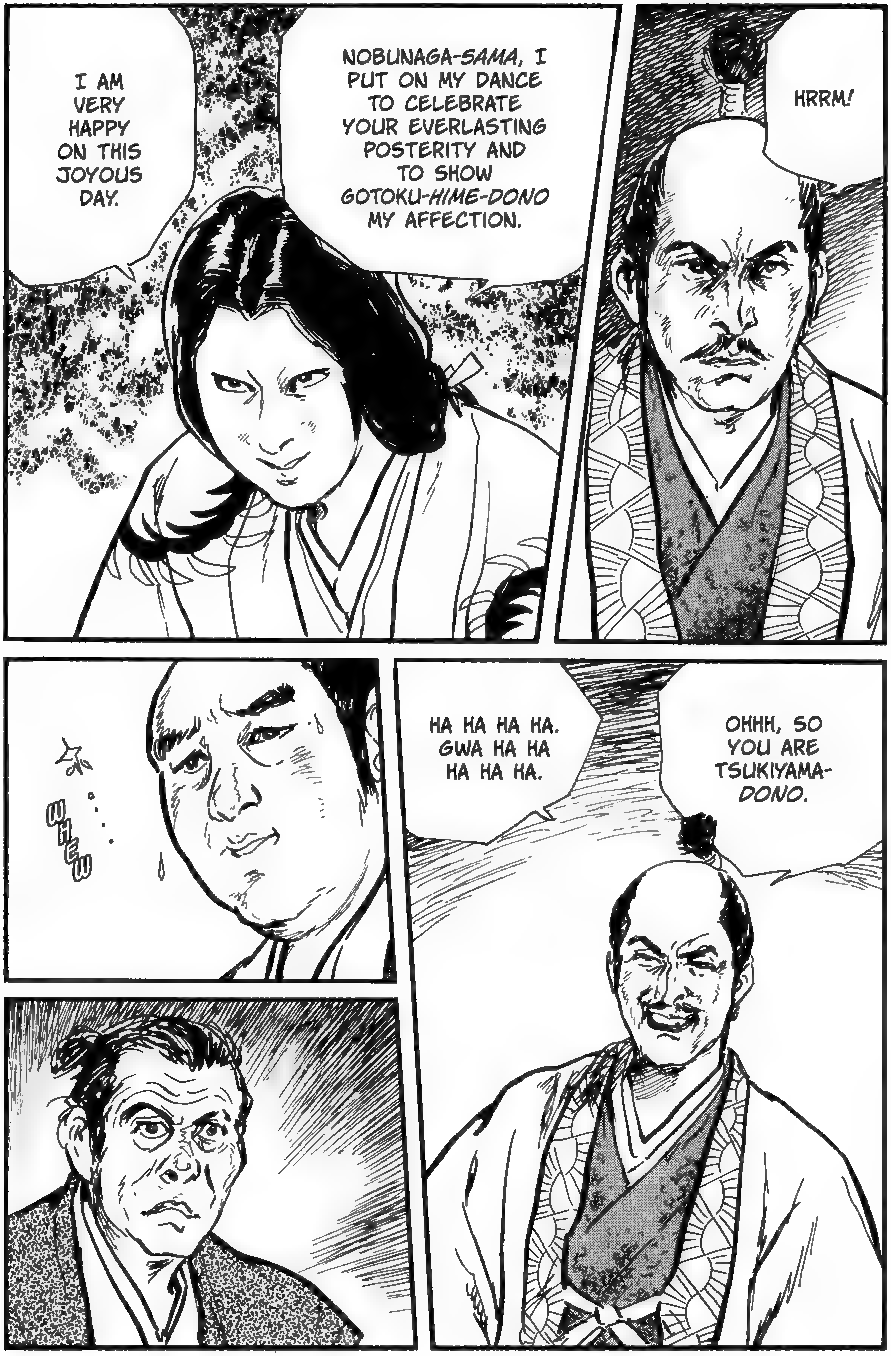

IEYASU-DONO FEELS THE SAME WAY...
TSUKIYAMA-DONO WILL BECOME A MOTHER TO GOTOKU-HIME. IT'S NO WONDER MILORD IS APPREHENSIVE. ESPECIALLY SINCE SHE'S AN IMAGAWA WOMAN.



BURRP
IT'S SPOILING THE PARTY.

THANK YOU.
CONGRAT-ULATIONS, SIR.

I AM TSUKIYAMA, IEYASU'S WIFE.
NOBUNAGA-SAMA, I AM PLEASED TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAINTANCE.
OH...


I AM VERY HAPPY ON THIS JOYOUS DAY.
NOBUNAGA-SAMA, I PUT ON MY DANCE TO CELEBRATE YOUR EVERLASTING POSTERITY AND TO SHOW GOTOKU-HIME-DONO MY AFFECTION.
HRRM!
HA HA HA HA. GWA HA HA HA HA HA.
OHHH, SO YOU ARE TSUKIYAMA-DONO.

THAT IS... TSUKIYAMA-DONO, WHO IS SO FAMOUS FOR BEING DIFFICULT...HOW DID IEYASU-DONO... WHAT DID HE DO TO... GET HER TO BEHAVE LIKE THAT...?
OH... MY...
BELCH!!

Chapter On Tenka Fubu

No. 1: Battle For Power, Part 1

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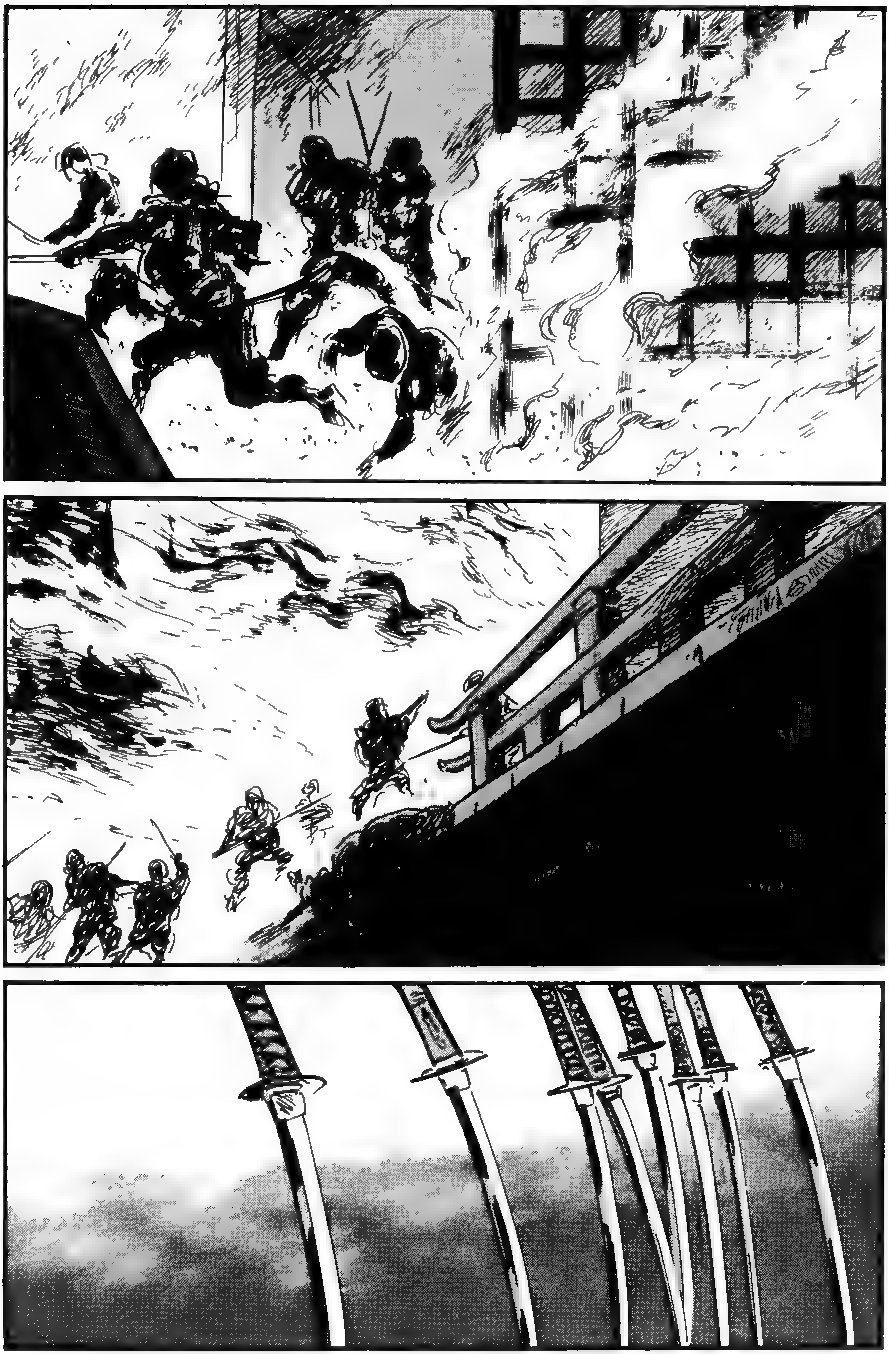
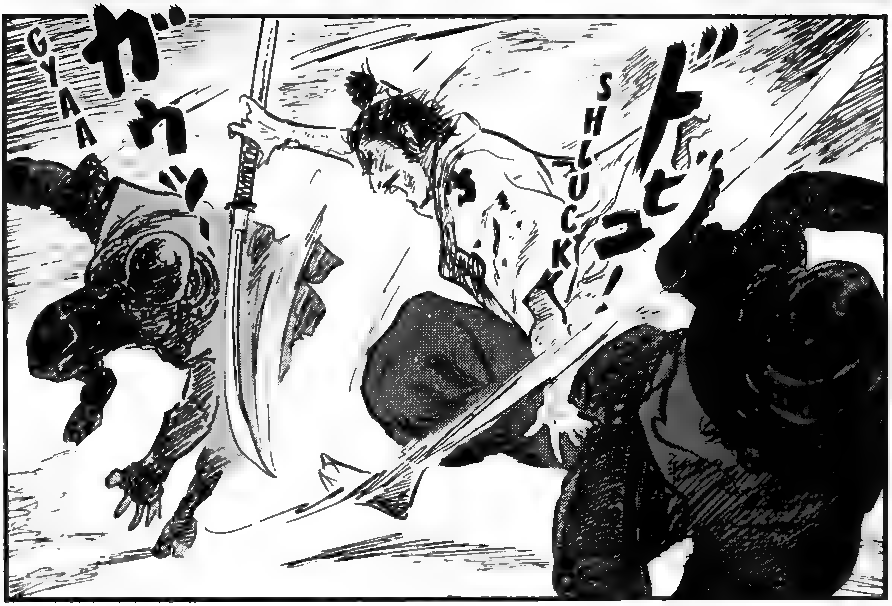
ROOOSH
ゴ
FOOSH




GYAA
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SHUCK
ドビュッ!

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BYU
FUM
UWA

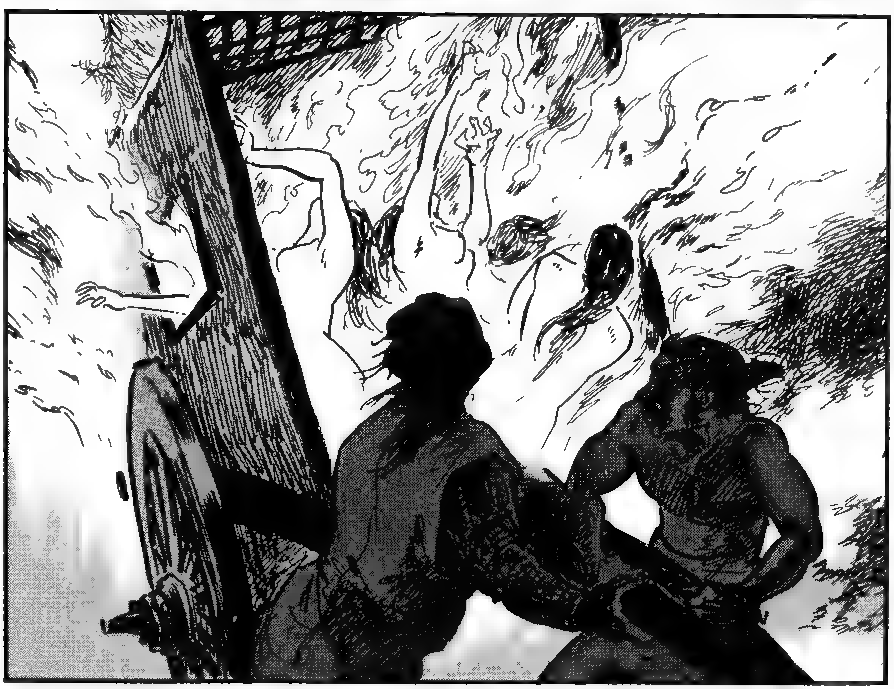
TUM TUM
SPLOTCH
SHUBUU

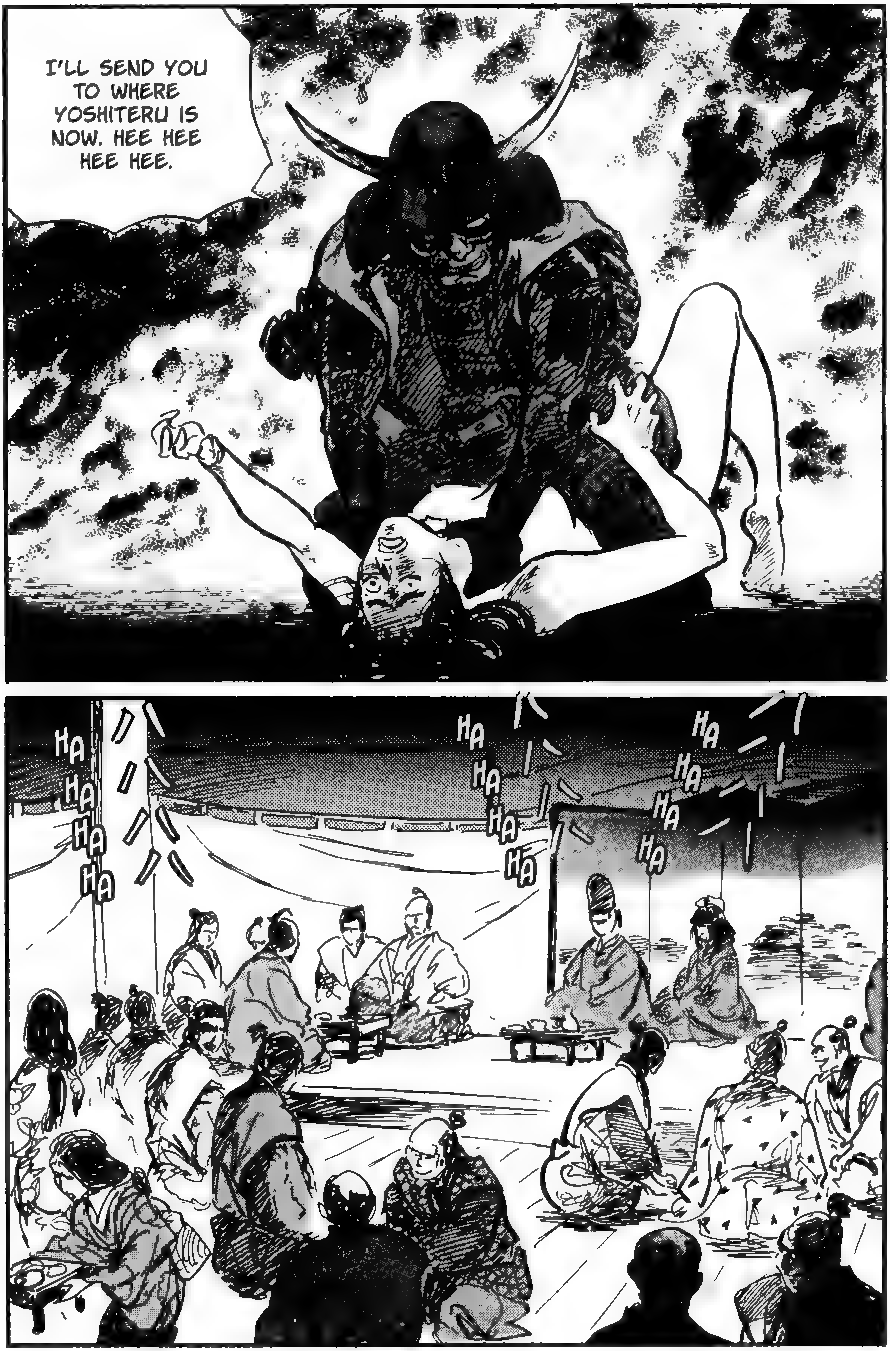
THUKK

WSSH
ズシャ
BLUUGH
ドロ
SHLUCK

SHAK
GLAK
THUKK
THWACK
SWACK

IF I'D LEFT IT STUCK IN THERE, I COULD'VE SLAUGHTERED A HUNDRED MORE! AHA HA HA HA HA HA!
I PULLED THE THORN WITHOUT THINKING.
URRG!! THAT WAS STUPID!
WITH NO BLOOD LEFT IN MY BODY, I WON'T BE ABLE TO GO ON. BUT I'M NOT HANDING OVER MY HEAD FOR A NICE TROPHY.




I'LL SEND YOU TO WHERE YOSHITERU IS NOW. HEE HEE HEE HEE.
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA HA

HOOO
HA HA HA HA
DRINK! DRINK MORE!
TAKECHIYO... ER, NO... MOTONOBU... NO, NOT THAT EITHER...
HA HA HA HA HA. IEYASU!! THAT'S IT. TOKUGAWA IEYASU IS IT. ISN'T THAT RIGHT, TAKECHIYO?

≷URP≸

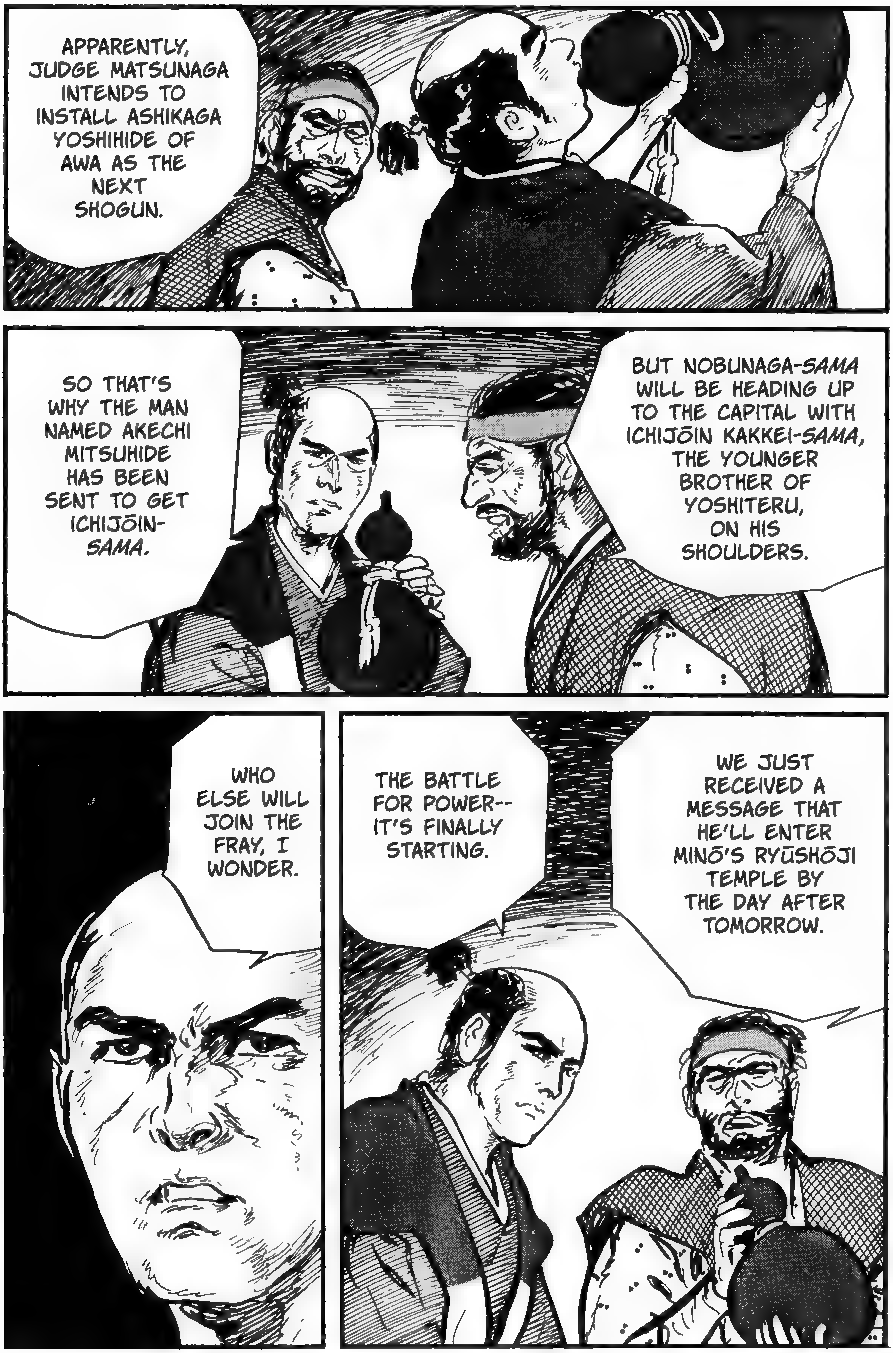
AND HE PULLED THEM OUT ONE AT A TIME AS HE POLISHED OFF HIS ENEMIES. AFTER HE SLAUGHTERED A WHOPPING TWENTY-ONE MEN, HE DIED.

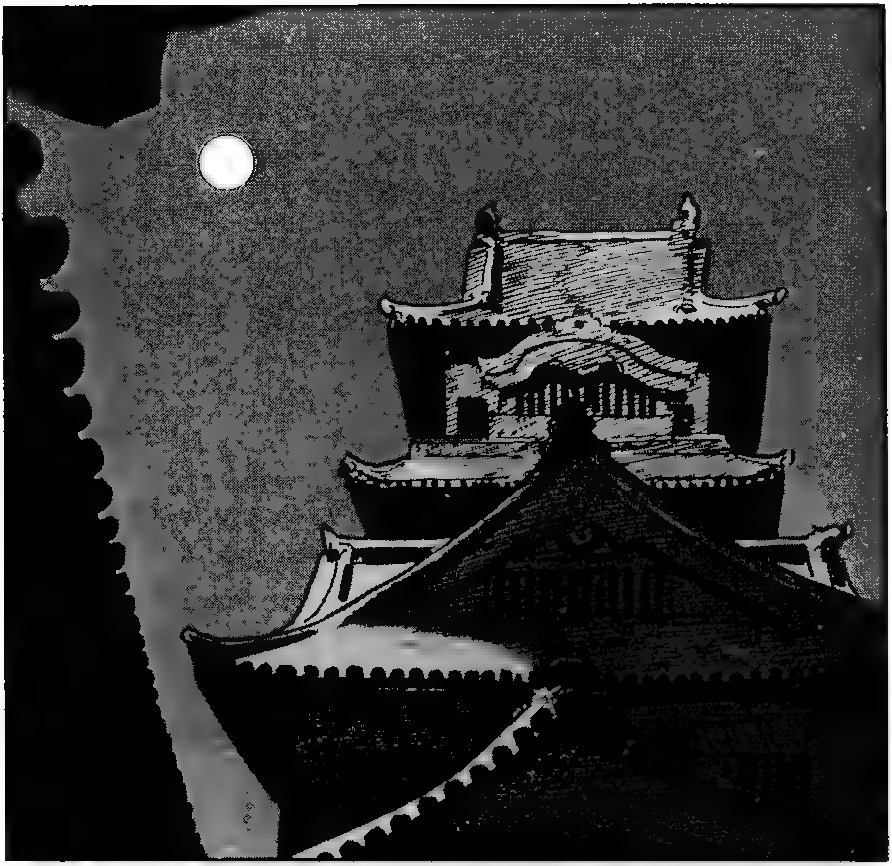
THEY SAY HE HAD OVER A DOZEN CELEBRATED *KATANA* STUCK IN THE FLOOR ALL AROUND HIM...

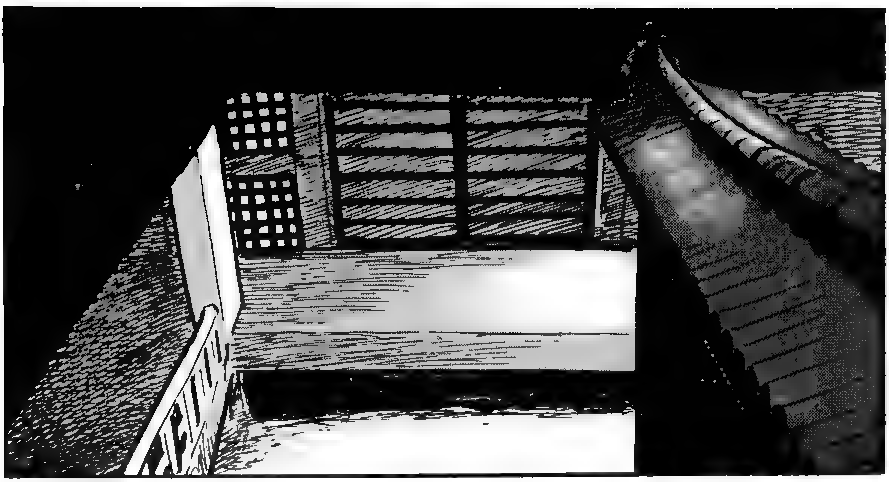
HAVING STUDIED UNDER TSUKAHARA BOKUDEN, THE SHOGUN YOSHITERU SURELY LIVED UP TO EXPECTATIONS. INDEED, I HEAR HIS SWORDSMANSHIP WAS REMARKABLE.

EVEN THE FAVORITE MISTRESS OF YOSHITERU, WHO HAD GONE TO CHIONIN TEMPLE, WAS RAPED AND KILLED.

NOT EVEN A HALF YEAR HAS PASSED SINCE THE NEW IMPERIAL PALACE WAS BUILT, BUT NOW IT'S BURNED TO CINDERS. MATSUNAGA FORCES RAPED WOMEN, STOLE TREASURE AND DID EVERY ATROCITY IMAGINABLE, I HEAR.


APPARENTLY, JUDGE MATSUNAGA INTENDS TO INSTALL ASHIKAGA YOSHIHIDE OF AWA AS THE NEXT SHOGUN.
SO THAT'S WHY THE MAN NAMED AKECHI MITSUHIDE HAS BEEN SENT TO GET ICHIJŌIN-SAMA.
BUT NOBUNAGA-SAMA WILL BE HEADING UP TO THE CAPITAL WITH ICHIJŌIN KAKKEI-SAMA, THE YOUNGER BROTHER OF YOSHITERU, ON HIS SHOULDERS.
WHO ELSE WILL JOIN THE FRAY, I WONDER.
THE BATTLE FOR POWER-- IT'S FINALLY STARTING.
WE JUST RECEIVED A MESSAGE THAT HE'LL ENTER MINŌ'S RYŪSHŌJI TEMPLE BY THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW.

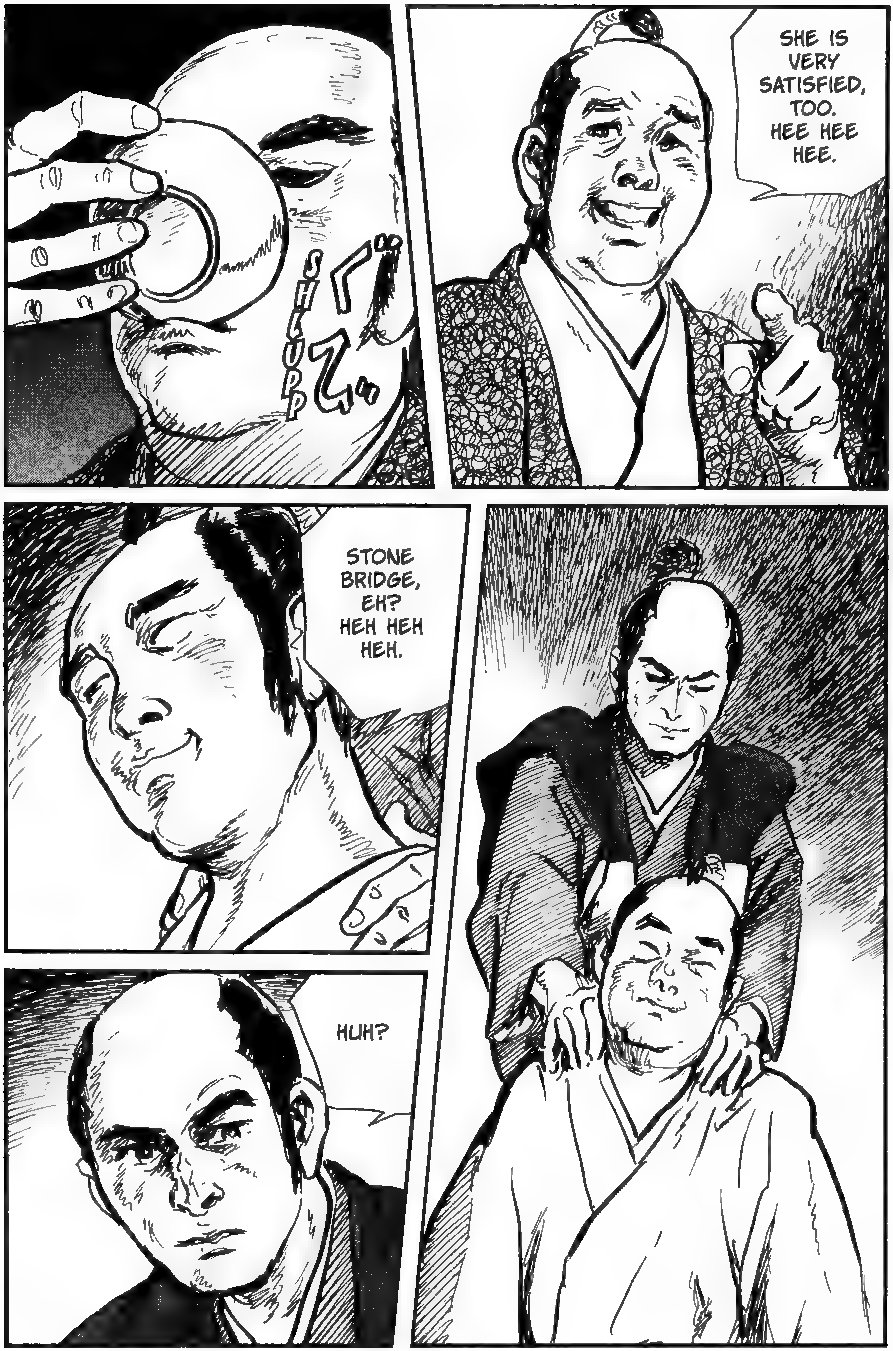




AHHH!
YES.
WELL, IT'S OVER AT LAST. NOW I CAN RELAX FOR A WHILE.

HEE HEE HEE HEE.
NOBUNAGA-DONO WAS IN GREAT HUMOR, TOO.

I'M GLAD TO HEAR IT.
IT WORKED! THAT VIRILITY POWDER YOU GAVE ME. HEH HEH HEH.


SHE IS VERY SATISFIED, TOO. HEE HEE HEE.
SHLURP
STONE BRIDGE, EH? HEH HEH HEH.
HUH?

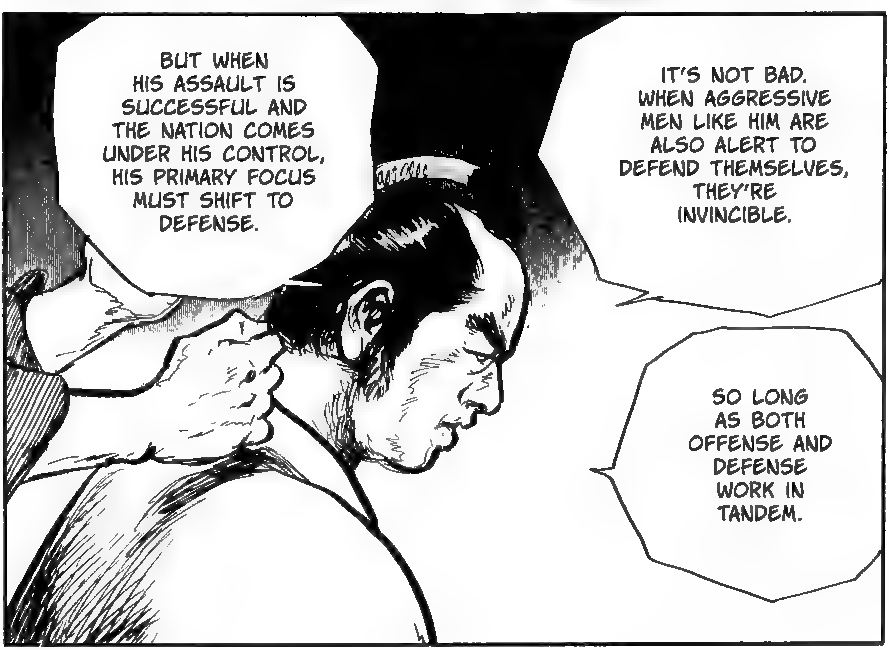
I WAS MISTAKEN.
I THOUGHT NOBUNAGA-*DONO* WASN'T THE KIND OF MAN WHO'D TAP THE STONE BRIDGE BEFORE CROSSING.
HE'S DONE ALL OF THAT USING WOMEN AS THE TIES THAT BIND.
ALLYING WITH KAI, KEEPING HŌJŌ IN CHECK, HAVING AZAI NAGAMASA KEEP AN EYE ON ECHIZEN, AND LEAVING ME IN CHARGE DURING HIS ABSENCE.
AND NOW HE'S TAKING IN ICHIJŌIN KAKKEI-*SAMA*.
BE IT HIS DAUGHTER OR HIS SISTER OR HIS ADOPTED DAUGHTER, HE DOESN'T CARE.

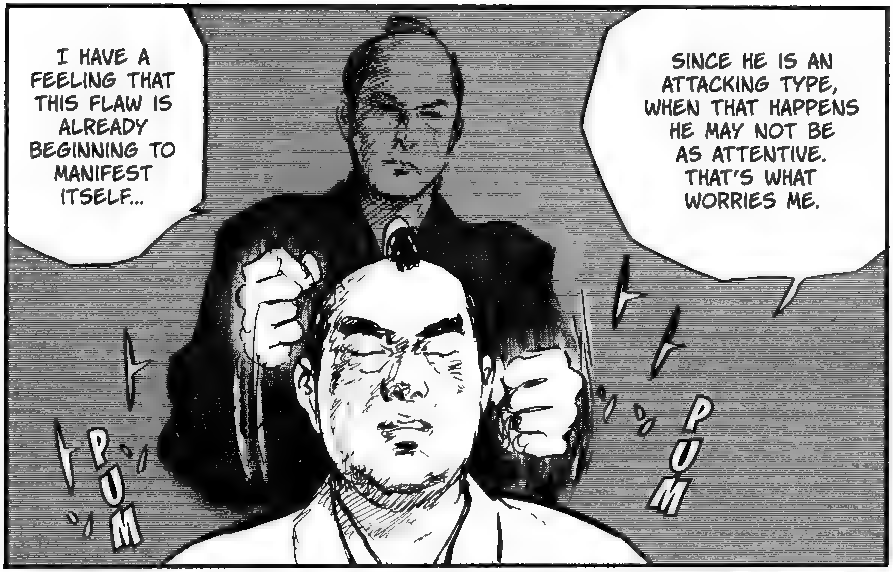
KNOWING THIS IS THE POWER STRUGGLE OF *TENKA FUBU*, HE KEEPS TAPPING ON THE STONE BRIDGE. AND YET, I HAVE THIS FEELING HE MAY NOT ACTUALLY CROSS IT.

IF HE WAS THE NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* I KNEW LONG AGO, HE WOULD'VE PACIFIED ISE THE MOMENT HE HAD MINŌ IN HIS HAND, THEN RACED STRAIGHT TO THE CAPITAL.
HE WORRIES TOO MUCH ABOUT OTHERS.
IT MAKES ME NERVOUS SOMETIMES.

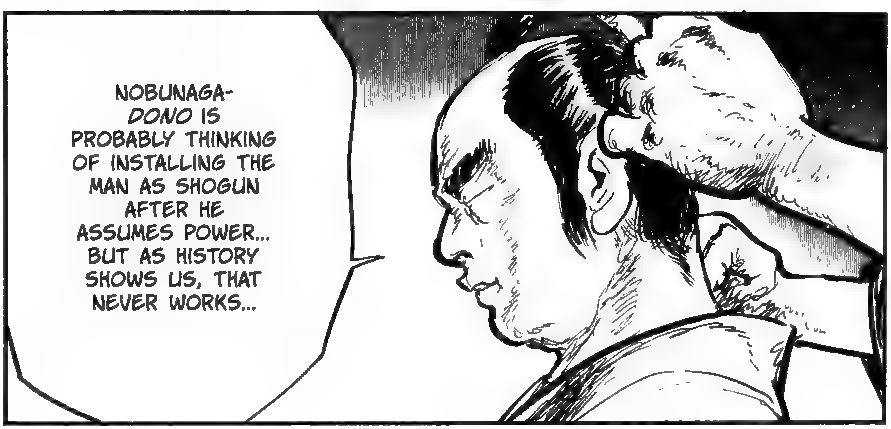
HE'LL PROBABLY JOIN HANDS WITH UESUGI TOO. BUT KNOWING NOBUNAGA-*DONO'S* IMPETUOUS NATURE...

I WOULD THINK IT'S GOOD TO BE CAREFUL ENOUGH TO TAP BEFORE WALKING ACROSS.
NEVER LOOKING BACK AND PAYING LITTLE HEED TO WHERE HE STEPPED. THAT WAS BOTH HIS STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS.
I GUESS NOW HE HAS TOO MUCH HE DOESN'T WANT TO LOSE.

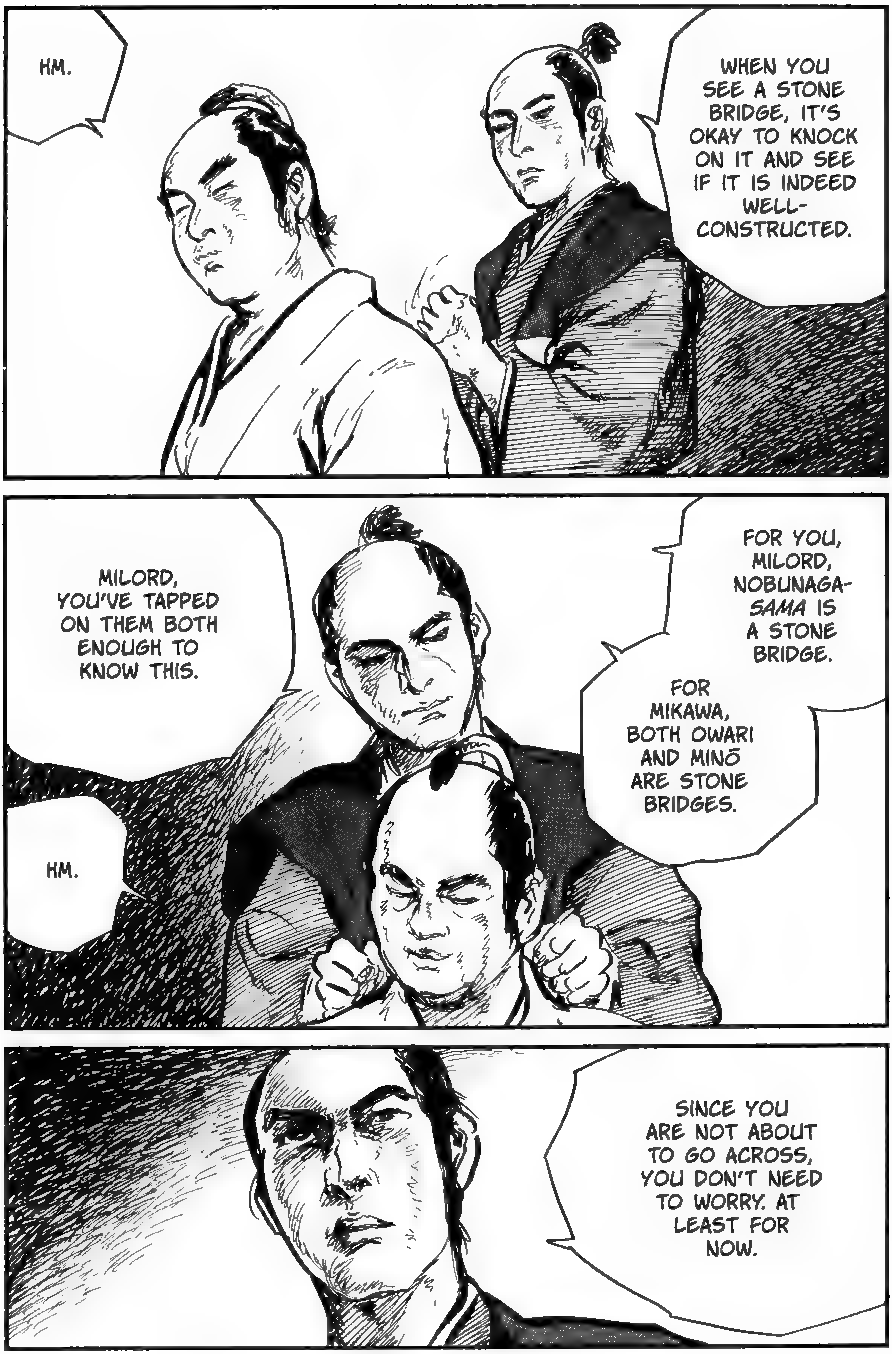

BUT WHEN HIS ASSAULT IS SUCCESSFUL AND THE NATION COMES UNDER HIS CONTROL, HIS PRIMARY FOCUS MUST SHIFT TO DEFENSE.
IT'S NOT BAD. WHEN AGGRESSIVE MEN LIKE HIM ARE ALSO ALERT TO DEFEND THEMSELVES, THEY'RE INVINCIBLE.
SO LONG AS BOTH OFFENSE AND DEFENSE WORK IN TANDEM.


I HAVE A FEELING THAT THIS FLAW IS ALREADY BEGINNING TO MANIFEST ITSELF...
SINCE HE IS AN ATTACKING TYPE, WHEN THAT HAPPENS HE MAY NOT BE AS ATTENTIVE. THAT'S WHAT WORRIES ME.
PUM
PUM

I DON'T THINK IT'S NECESSARY TO BOTHER CROWNING A DESCENDANT OF ASHIKAGA NAMED ICHIJŌIN KAKKEI.


NOBUNAGA-*DONO* IS PROBABLY THINKING OF INSTALLING THE MAN AS SHOGUN AFTER HE ASSUMES POWER... BUT AS HISTORY SHOWS US, THAT NEVER WORKS...

MILORD. IS A STONE BRIDGE TAPPED ONLY WHEN IT'S TO BE CROSSED?
IN MY CASE, I GUESS, I'M NOT BEING CAUTIOUS BUT RATHER OVER-ANXIOUS ABOUT THE FUTURE. HA HA HA HA HA.
OF COURSE. IF YOU'RE NOT CROSSING, THERE'S NO NEED TO DO IT.
I THINK IT'S SMART TO TAP SOMETIMES WITH NO INTENTION OF GOING ACROSS.


HM.
WHEN YOU SEE A STONE BRIDGE, IT'S OKAY TO KNOCK ON IT AND SEE IF IT IS INDEED WELL-CONSTRUCTED.
MILORD, YOU'VE TAPPED ON THEM BOTH ENOUGH TO KNOW THIS.
FOR YOU, MILORD, NOBUNAGA-SAMA IS A STONE BRIDGE.
FOR MIKAWA, BOTH OWARI AND MINŌ ARE STONE BRIDGES.
HM.
SINCE YOU ARE NOT ABOUT TO GO ACROSS, YOU DON'T NEED TO WORRY. AT LEAST FOR NOW.

HAVING CHECKED BUT NOT CROSSING. HAVING KNOCKED, WE'RE NOW WAITING. THAT'S MIKAWA TODAY.
YES.
KEEP POUNDING. YOU STOPPED YOUR HANDS.
A THOUSAND GENERATIONS OF BAMBOO. TAKECHIYO, INDEED. AH HA HA HA HA.
ARE MY SHOULDERS A STONE BRIDGE?
YES.
NO, NOT AT ALL. THEY'RE STILL A BAMBOO BRIDGE. HOWEVER, AS THE ENGINEERS WE ARE BUILDING IT SO FIRMLY IT WILL LAST A THOUSAND GENERATIONS, FAR LONGER THAN A STONE BRIDGE.

ECHIZEN

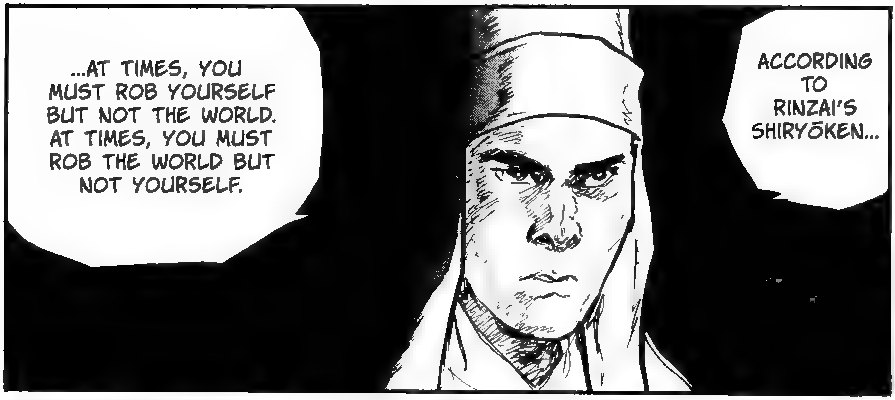
SO, MITSUHIDE.
YOU ARE THE PROMISING DESCENDANT OF THE FAMED AKECHI CLAN. LIFT YOUR FACE.

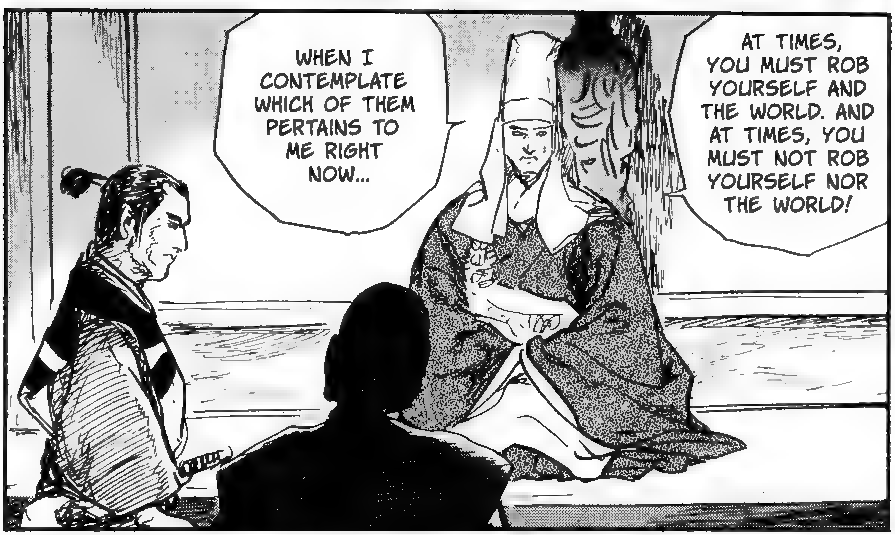
DOES NOBUNAGA-*DONO* HAVE ANY REAL CHANCE OF SUCCESS?!
YOU SAY YOU'LL TAKE ME TO MINŌ. NOW, EVEN ASAKURA HERE HAS NEARLY FORSAKEN ALL HOPE OF TAKING CONTROL OF THE NATION, KNOWING HOW DIFFICULT THIS IS.
IT'S NOT EVEN EASY TO LEAVE ECHIZEN!
UNLESS YOU CAN SHOW ME PROOF, I CANNOT MAKE SUCH A MOVE THOUGHT-LESSLY.

NO ONE HAS EVER LEFT THIS WORLD ALIVE.
I CAN'T EXPECT YOSHIKAGE TO SIMPLY LET ME GO MERELY BECAUSE I WANT TO.
OR IS IT WHAT HE ULTIMATELY ACHIEVES?
THAT IS THE FATE OF ALL MEN. YOUR MAJESTY, WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER IS A MAN'S LIFE? IS IT HOW HE CONDUCTS HIMSELF?

NO ONE HAS EVER LEFT THIS WORLD ALIVE, HUH? INDEED.
HMM.
IT'S TRUE, A MAN'S DAYS ARE CONFINED ONLY TO THIS WORLD.
YOU ALWAYS IMPRESS ME, AKECHI-*DONO*. YOU SPOKE WELL.
BUT WE ARE FREE TO CHOOSE HOW WE SPEND OUR LIMITED TIME.

EVEN BEFORE I QUESTION HOW I SHOULD LIVE MY LIFE, WHAT I WANT IS SOMETHING THAT SHOWS WHAT I DID, A CLEAR TESTAMENT OF HOW I SPENT MY DAYS.
THAT WAY, I'LL HAVE NO REGRETS WHEN I DEPART THIS WORLD.
AND THAT'S PRECISELY WHY I SERVE NOBUNAGA-SAMA.
IN SHORT, MY EFFORT WOULD BE HELPFUL IN ESTABLISHING PEACE. I'VE DEDICATED MY LIFE TO IT.
I MAY HAVE LITTLE TO OFFER, BUT WHAT I DO IS USEFUL TO HIM, AND HIS POWER IS USEFUL TO INAUGURATE YOUR MAJESTY AS SHOGUN!

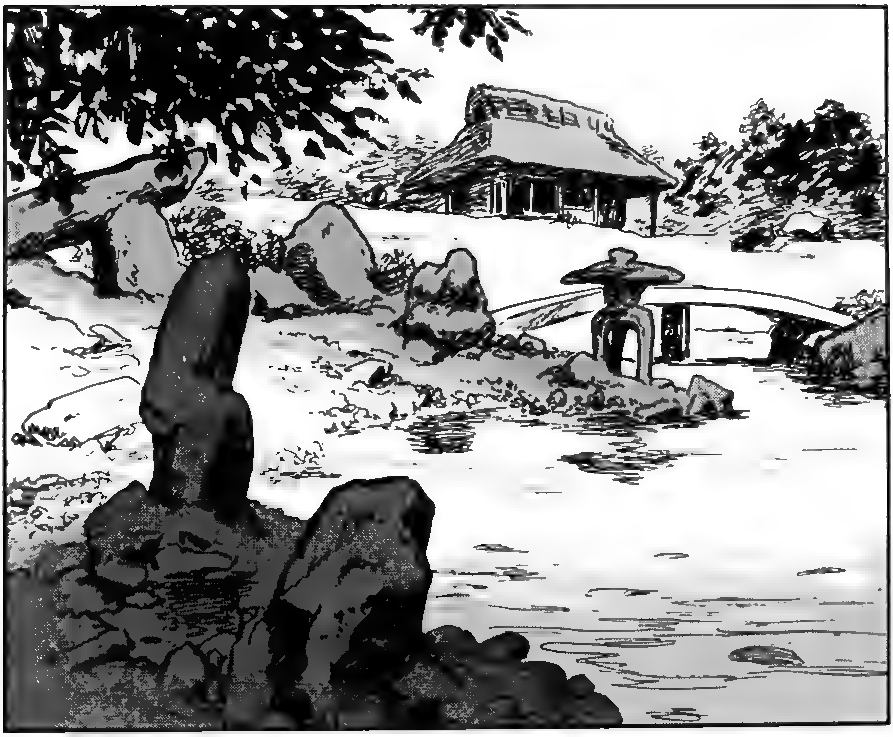

ACCORDING TO RINZAI'S SHIRYŌKEN...
...AT TIMES, YOU MUST ROB YOURSELF BUT NOT THE WORLD. AT TIMES, YOU MUST ROB THE WORLD BUT NOT YOURSELF.


AT TIMES, YOU MUST ROB YOURSELF AND THE WORLD. AND AT TIMES, YOU MUST NOT ROB YOURSELF NOR THE WORLD!
WHEN I CONTEMPLATE WHICH OF THEM PERTAINS TO ME RIGHT NOW...

NONE OF THEM APPLIES TO YOU. "YOU MUST NOT ROB YOURSELF NOR THE WORLD" WOULD APPLY ONLY AFTER YOU ARE INAUGURATED AS SHOGUN.

PLEASE PUT IT BACK ON FOR NOW!
I SHALL LIVE UNDER NOBUNAGA-DONO'S PROTEC-TION.
?!
PERHAPS FOR NOW YOU MUST ROB THE WORLD BUT NOT YOURSELF.
IF YOU TAKE IT OFF IN FRONT OF YOSHIKAGE-SAMA, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO LEAVE ECHIZEN WITHOUT TROUBLE.

MMM.
GOOD
IDEA.

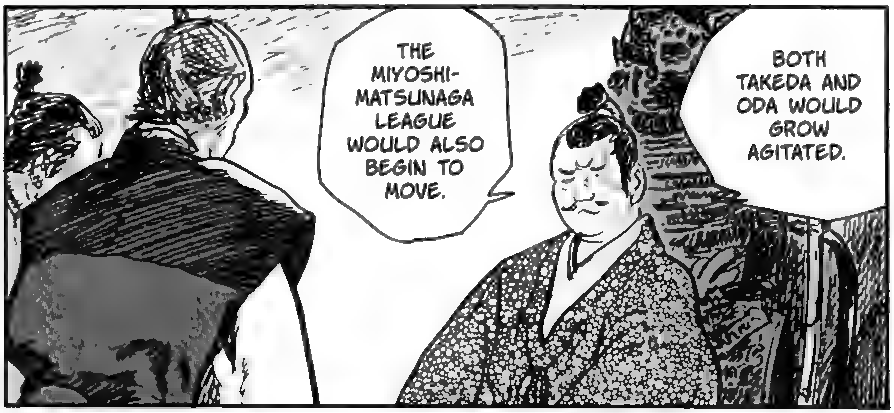


WHAT?! YOU WANT TO RETURN TO A SECULAR LIFE, YOUR HIGHNESS?
WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO DO ONCE YOU QUIT PRIESTHOOD?
INDEED.
I WILL DECLARE MYSELF THE FIFTEENTH SHOGUN AND AVENGE MY BROTHER YOSHITERU.

THIS BEING THE CASE, SIR, WE WOULD APPRECIATE IT IF YOU COULD ASSIST HIM WITH THE RITUAL...
KAKKEI-SAMA SHALL RENOUNCE THE CLOTH AND PRESENT HIMSELF AS THE FIFTEENTH SHOGUN, YOSHIAKI-SAMA.
H...HOLD IT.
I CANNOT AGREE TO IT...NOT RIGHT THIS INSTANT...
P...PLEASE WAIT.

WE ACCOMPANIED THEM TO THE PROVINCE BORDER.
DID THE *MONSHU* OF NANTO ICHIJŌIN LEAVE?

IF HE'D ANNOUNCED HIMSELF TO BE THE FIFTEENTH SHOGUN RIGHT HERE, IT WOULD BE THE SAME AS TELLING THE WORLD I'M INTENT ON TAKING SOVEREIGN POWER. THAT WOULD STIR UP A HUGE RUCKUS.
RENOUNCING PRIESTHOOD? WHAT A FOOLISH THING TO SAY.

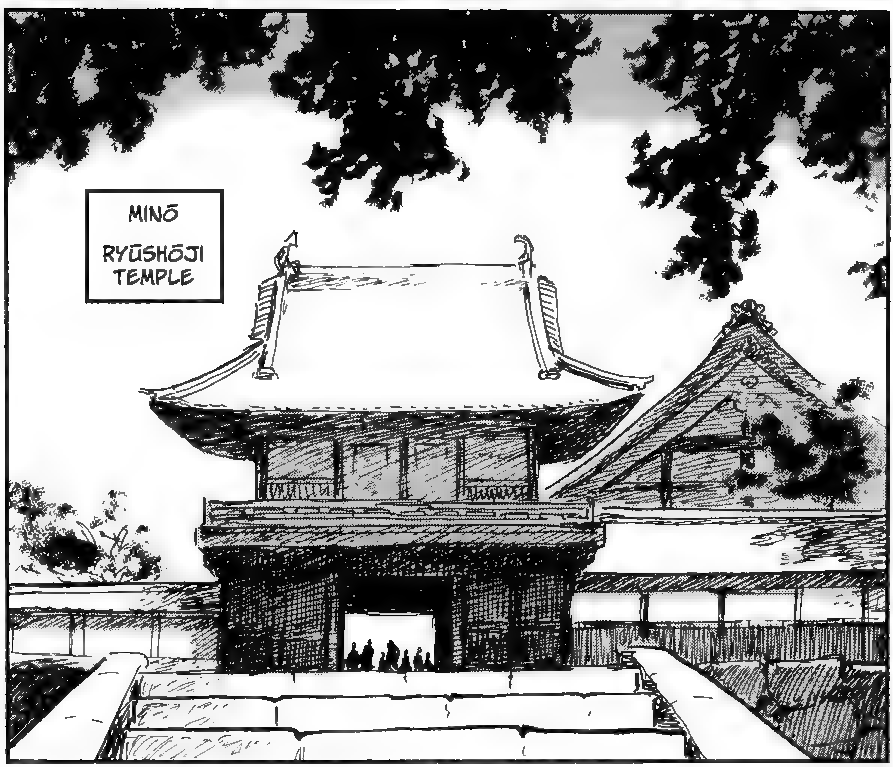

THE MIYOSHI-MATSUNAGA LEAGUE WOULD ALSO BEGIN TO MOVE.
BOTH TAKEDA AND ODA WOULD GROW AGITATED.

THANK GOD THEY'RE OUT OF OUR HAIR.

AND THAT OTHER MAN, HOSOKAWA FUJITAKA. THEY'RE BOTH VERY INSIDIOUS.
BUT THAT MITSUHIDE. HE REFUSED TO WORK FOR ME. APPROACHING KAKKEI NOW, WHAT NOTIONS DID HE PUT IN HIS HEAD?

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
ARE THEY VYING TO RULE THE NATION, ONLY THE THREE OF THEM TOGETHER?
WHA... WHAT?!
MILORD, WHEN WE WERE PARTING, MITSUHIDE SENT YOU HIS REGARDS, REFERRING TO HIMSELF AS ODA'S VASSAL.
DID HE COME TO TAKE KAKKEI OUT OF HERE ON NOBUNAGA'S ORDERS?!!
AAK!! THAT BASTARD...

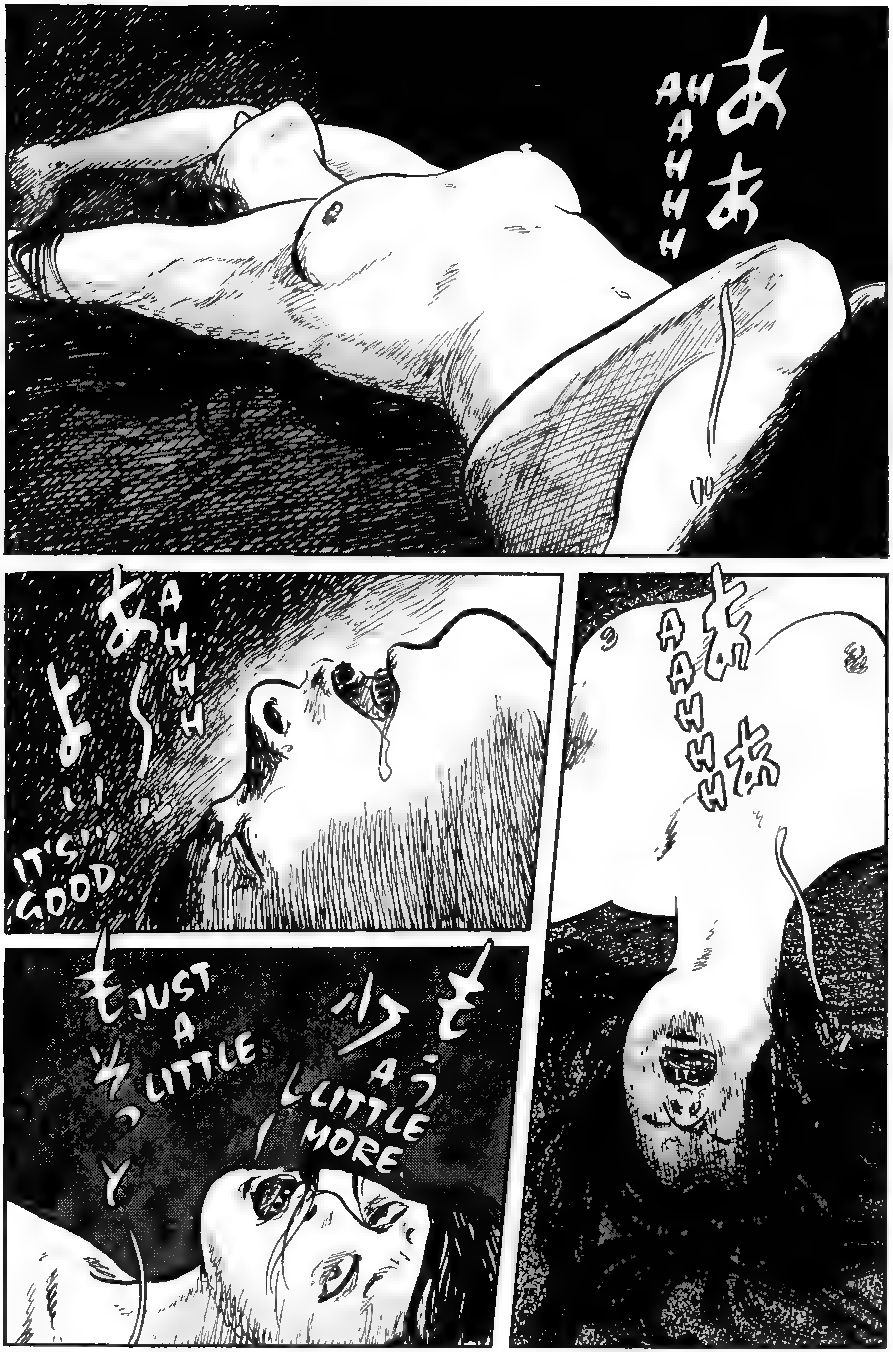
IT WILL SPARK THE BATTLE FOR POWER! URRRG...
DAMN!! ONCE NOBUNAGA GETS A HOLD OF KAKKEI... URK...IT'LL HAVE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES!


MINŌ
RYŪSHŌJI TEMPLE

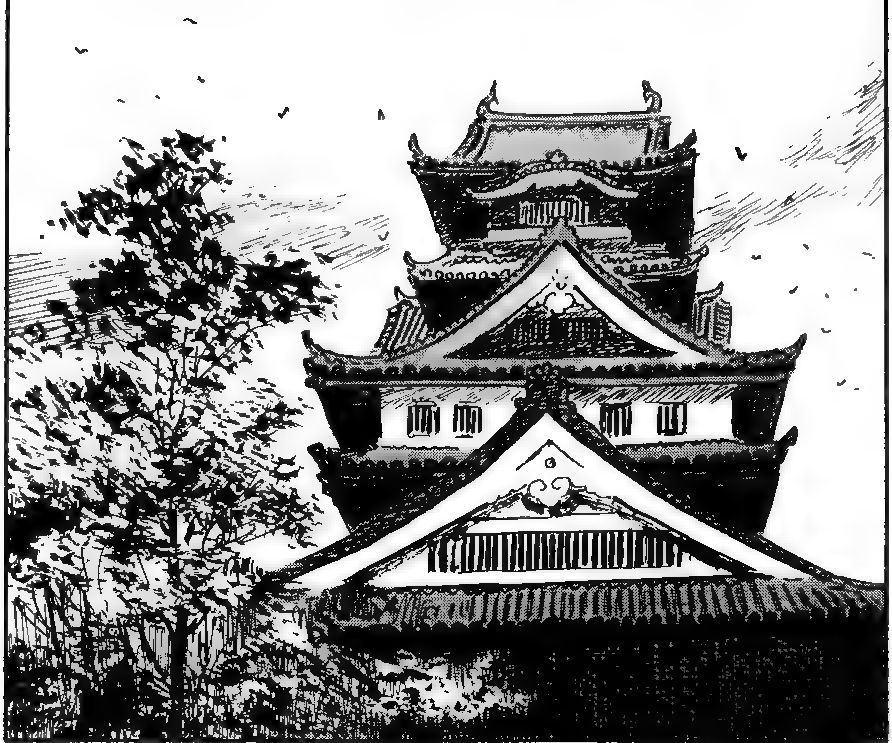
I AM ODA NOBUNAGA. YOUR MAJESTY MUST BE EXHAUSTED.
I AM ASHIKAGA YOSHIAKI.
I AM VERY OBLIGED THAT YOU TOOK THE TROUBLE TO COME TO MEET ME.

WITH YOU, I'LL TAKE THE FIRST STEP TOWARD THE BATTLE OF *TENKA FUBU.*
HOWEVER, I WILL HAVE TO ASK YOU TO TAKE THE FIELD IN NO TIME.
I'LL LET HIM KNOW I'M ABOUT TO MARCH ON THE CAPITAL, SERVING YOU, YOSHIAKI-*SAMA*-- AND I WILL ASK HIM TO MAKE PEACE WITH TAKEDA.
I AM THINKING OF SENDING A LETTER TO UESUGI KENSHIN OF ECHIGO IMMEDIATELY.

YOU'RE LIKE FIRE.
UNDER-STOOD?
JUST AS SWIFT.
MEAN-ING?
THE FIFTEENTH SHOGUN, ASHIKAGA YOSHIAKI. HE WAS TWENTY-SEVEN AT THE TIME.
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA


あああ
AHAHHH
あ
AHHH
よい
IT'S GOOD
JUST A LITTLE
A LITTLE MORE

AAHHH!!
AH! AHHH!
AH AHHH
SUCK ME!
SUCK!
SQUEEZE

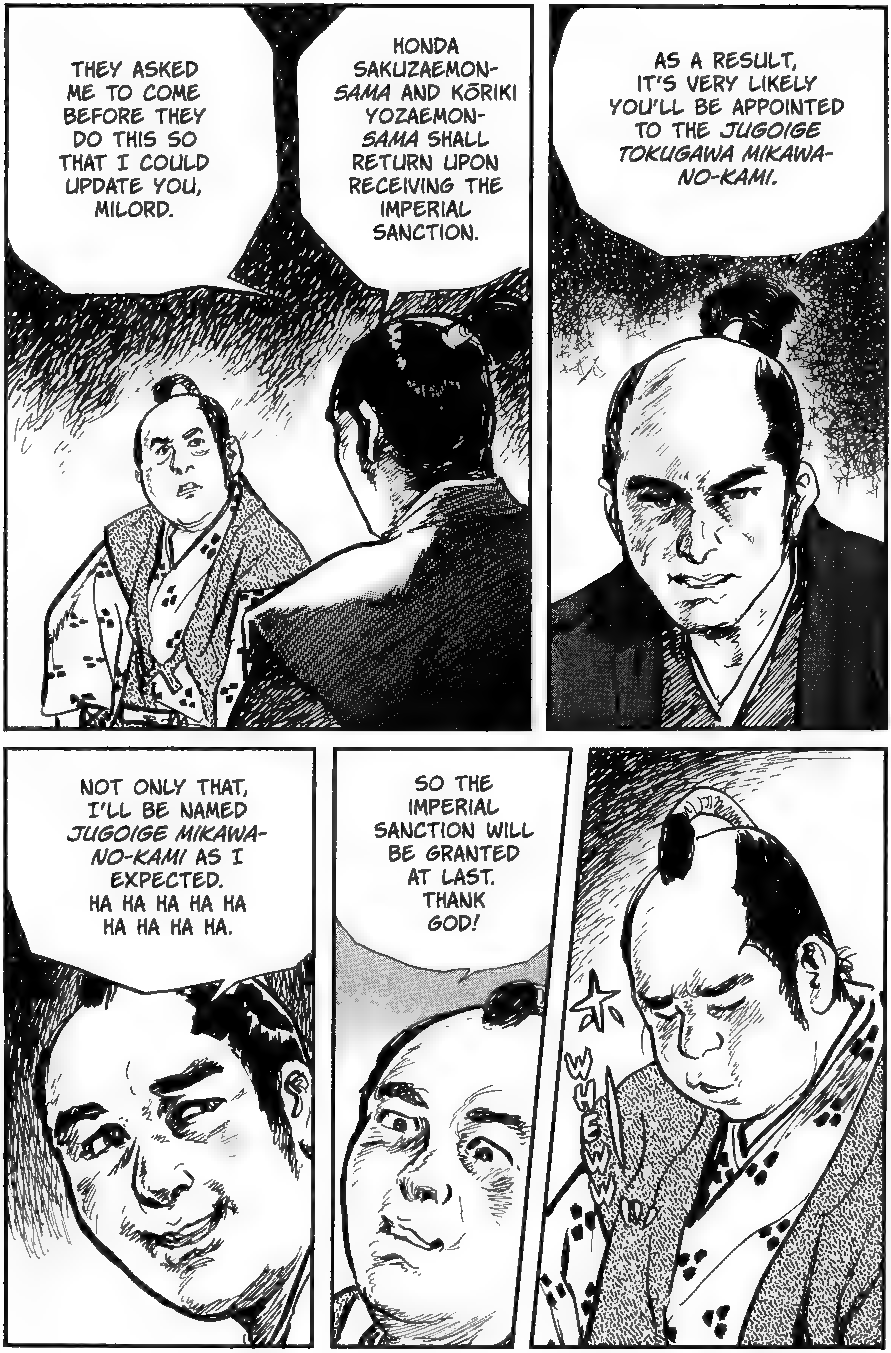


BURR
BUERRA

I'VE JUST RETURNED, MILORD.
HE'S LATE...

I'M TIRED. SIMPLY GETTING ON MY FEET IS EXHAUSTING.
HOW ARE YOU, SIR?
YES.
SO? HOW DID IT GO?

WITH THE HELP OF THE REVERED PRIEST KEISHIN OF SEIGANJI TEMPLE, KONOE SAKIHISA-SAMA, THE KANPAKU, TOOK CARE OF EVERYTHING.
YEAH?!
YOSHIDA KANESUKE-SAMA AT THE JINGI-KAN WILL MAKE IT SO THERE WILL BE A FAMILY NAME, TOKUGAWA, AMONG THE ANCESTORS OF THE MADENOKŌJI FAMILY.
APPARENTLY, HE'S GOING TO MAKE THE FAMILY TREE SHOW THAT TOKUGAWA IS LINKED TO THE ANCESTORS OF THE MATSUDAIRA CLAN.


THEY ASKED ME TO COME BEFORE THEY DO THIS SO THAT I COULD UPDATE YOU, MILORD.
HONDA SAKUZAEMON-*SAMA* AND KŌRIKI YOZAEMON-*SAMA* SHALL RETURN UPON RECEIVING THE IMPERIAL SANCTION.
AS A RESULT, IT'S VERY LIKELY YOU'LL BE APPOINTED TO THE *JUGOIGE TOKUGAWA MIKAWA-NO-KAMI.*
NOT ONLY THAT, I'LL BE NAMED *JUGOIGE MIKAWA-NO-KAMI* AS I EXPECTED. HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
SO THE IMPERIAL SANCTION WILL BE GRANTED AT LAST. THANK GOD!
WWSWW

OH...
IT'S MORE COMFORT-ABLE THIS WAY.
I'M OKAY. DON'T WORRY.
IT'S NOT GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH TO LIE DOWN LIKE THAT. IF YOU'RE TIRED, PLEASE WITHDRAW TO YOUR SLEEPING CHAMBERS.
IT APPEARS YOU'LL BE FALSIFYING YOUR FAMILY HISTORY, MILORD.

IF THIS IS WHAT YOU BELIEVE, ISN'T THAT ENOUGH, MILORD?
AND YOUR INTENT WAS TO CHANGE YOUR NAME TO REPRESENT IT.
YOU ONCE TOLD ME YOU WANTED TO BECOME A GREAT RIVER OF VIRTUE.
WHY BOTHER TO REQUEST AN IMPERIAL SANCTION NOW? YOU ALREADY GO BY THAT NAME, AND EVERYONE ACKNOWLEDGES AND ACCEPTS IT.
HANZŌ. DO YOU WANT ME TO GIVE YOU THE NAME MATSUDAIRA?

IT'S A DISTINGUISHED FAMILY NAME. IT'S BEEN AROUND FOR EIGHT GENERATIONS!
WHA...WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!
I MEAN IT. I'M THINKING OF ALLOWING MY KEY VASSALS TO GO BY THAT NAME.
I'M NOT JOKING.
IT'S TOO MUCH, EVEN AS A JOKE.
ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO'D PRIZE IT AND THOSE I SUSPECT OF HIDING SECRET MOTIVES.

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
GIVING THEM THE NAME WILL UNITE US ALL, AND THINGS WILL WORK OUT WELL.
I THINK THAT'S WHAT POLITICS IS ABOUT.
SURUGA!
WHILE NOBUNAGA-*DONO* IS ADVANCING INTO THE WEST, WE MUST MOVE EASTWARD. TAKEDA IS EYEING THE EAST, TOO. BEFORE THEY GET TO IT FIRST, WE'LL SNATCH UP...
THAT'S WHY I'LL GRANT THE NAME MATSUDAIRA TO THE DIFFICULT ONES.
AT A TIME LIKE THIS, WE MUST ENSURE WE'RE STABLE DOMESTICALLY.

BUT TO DO THAT, I NEED PERMISSION FROM THE IMPERIAL COURT TO PRESENT MYSELF AS TOKUGAWA. OTHERWISE, I CAN'T OFFER MATSUDAIRA TO ANYONE. BESIDES, IT WON'T BE AS VALUED WITHOUT IT.
AND I HAVE ANOTHER REASON. COME CLOSER.
SPEAKING OF THE *JUGOIGE MIKAWA-NO-KAMI*, THAT WILL PUT ME IN THE SAME RANK AS THE LATE IMAGAWA YOSHIMOTO-*KŌ*.

YOSHIMOTO-KŌ IS SOMEONE MY WIFE STILL RESPECTS AS THE GREATEST MAN EVER.
YOU KNOW, I'VE GOT HER HOOKED ON THIS HORRIFIC NIGHTTIME HABIT. BUT NOW THAT I'LL BE NAMED MIKAWA-NO-KAMI..
NOTHING. JUST FORGET IT.
ER... URM...
HUH?
I WON'T HAVE TO LICK HER ANYMORE.

AH AHHH... QUICK...
THE IMPERIAL SANCTION IS GRANTED.
I'LL BE APPOINTED TO THE JUGOIGE MIKAWA-NO-KAMI AT LAST.
WHAT'S THE MATTER?

IT WILL DISGRACE YOUR RANK.
NEVER DO THAT AGAIN!
HERE.
WHAT ?!
WELL THEN, YOU DO THAT TO ME FROM NOW ON.

あッあ
AH AH
あぁッ
AAH
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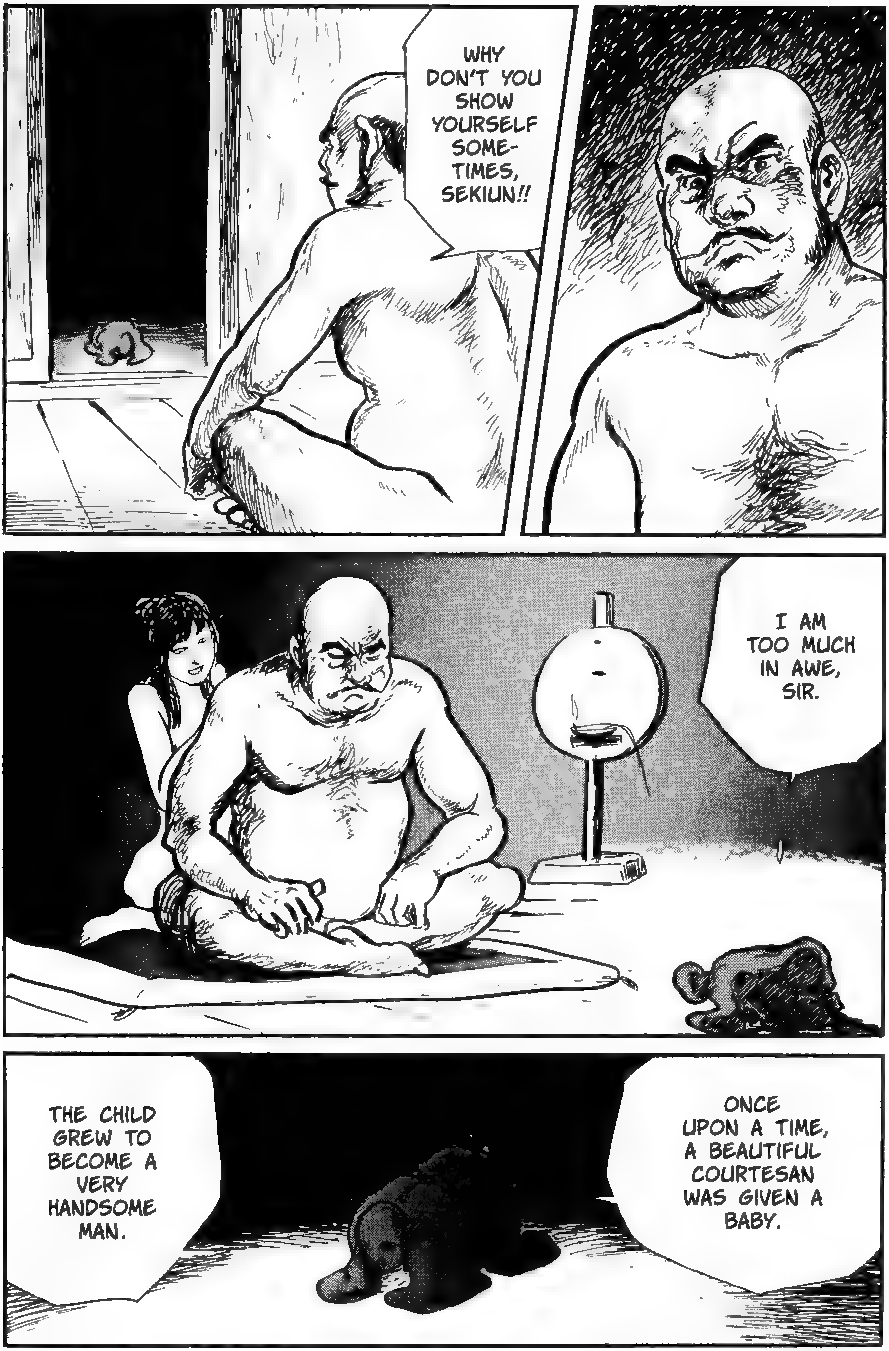
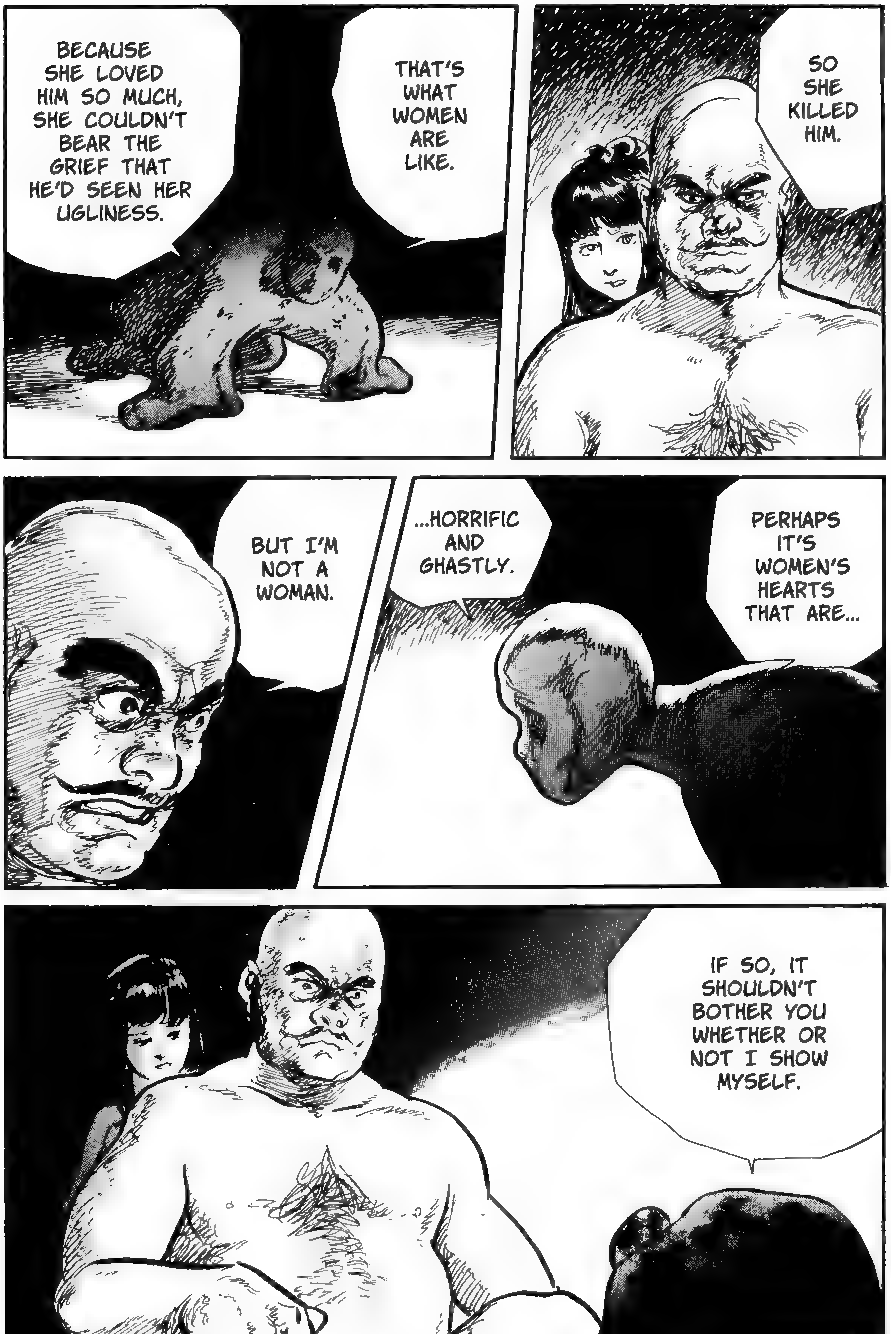
THIS IS HACHIYA SEKIUN. ON YOUR SUMMONS, I HAVE COME TO YOU.

Z
SUUU


WHY DON'T YOU SHOW YOURSELF SOMETIMES, SEKIUN!!
I AM TOO MUCH IN AWE, SIR.
ONCE UPON A TIME, A BEAUTIFUL COURTESAN WAS GIVEN A BABY.
THE CHILD GREW TO BECOME A VERY HANDSOME MAN.

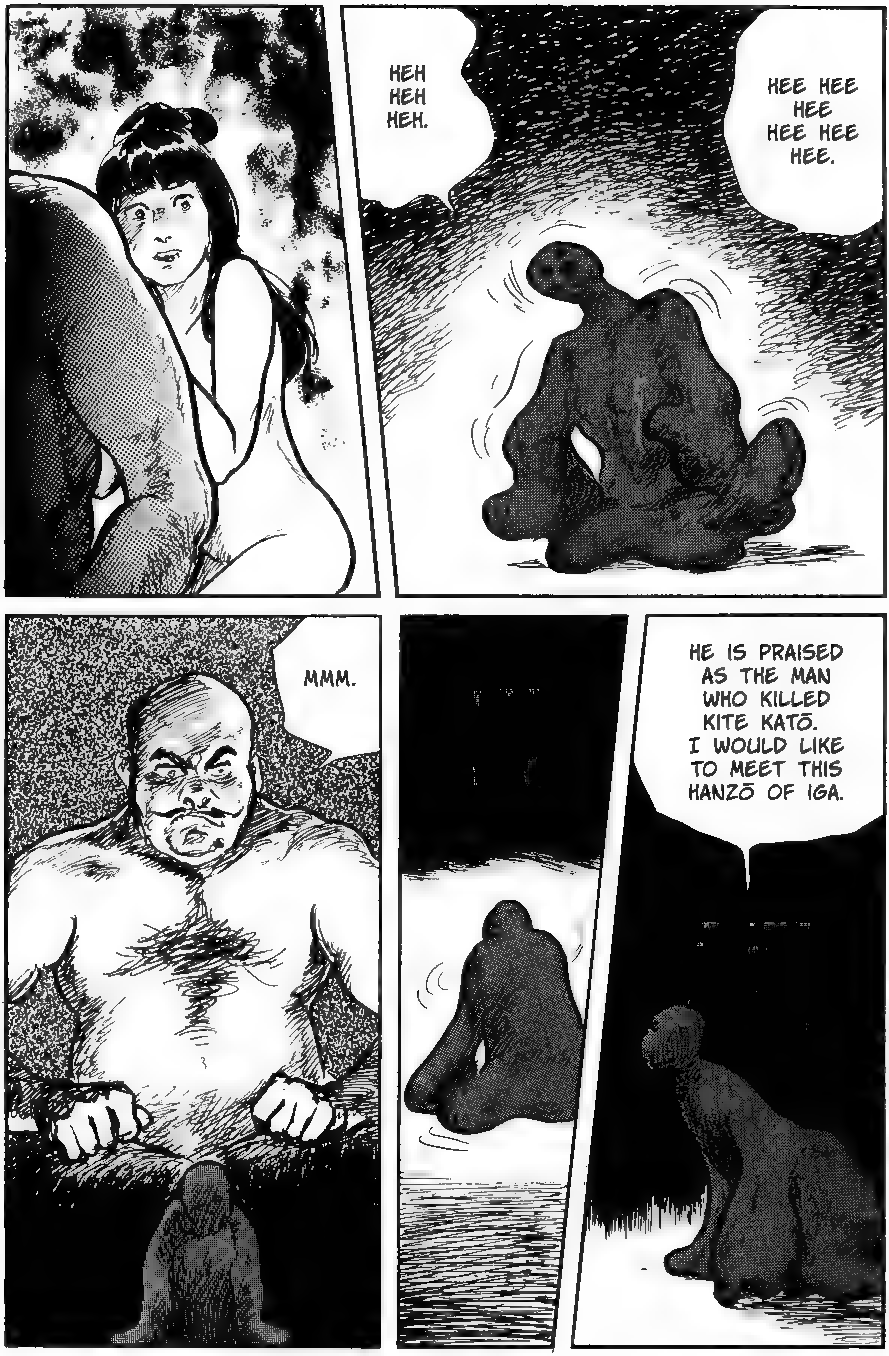
TEN YEARS PASSED THAT WAY. THE COURTESAN GREW OLD, AND HER BEAUTY FADED. THEN IT WAS DECIDED THAT THE MAN SHOULD TAKE A WIFE.
BY AND BY, THE COURTESAN BEGAN MAKING LOVE TO HIM.
AND HER LAST WORDS WERE...
"DO NOT LIGHT THE CANDLE UNTIL I AM GONE."
ON THEIR LAST NIGHT TOGETHER, THEY MADE LOVE OVER AND OVER. AFTER THAT, THE COURTESAN GOT UP QUIETLY.
YES. BEFORE THE COURTESAN COULD FULLY DRESS HERSELF.
I BET HE LIT IT.


BECAUSE SHE LOVED HIM SO MUCH, SHE COULDN'T BEAR THE GRIEF THAT HE'D SEEN HER UGLINESS.
THAT'S WHAT WOMEN ARE LIKE.
SO SHE KILLED HIM.
BUT I'M NOT A WOMAN.
...HORRIFIC AND GHASTLY.
PERHAPS IT'S WOMEN'S HEARTS THAT ARE...
IF SO, IT SHOULDN'T BOTHER YOU WHETHER OR NOT I SHOW MYSELF.

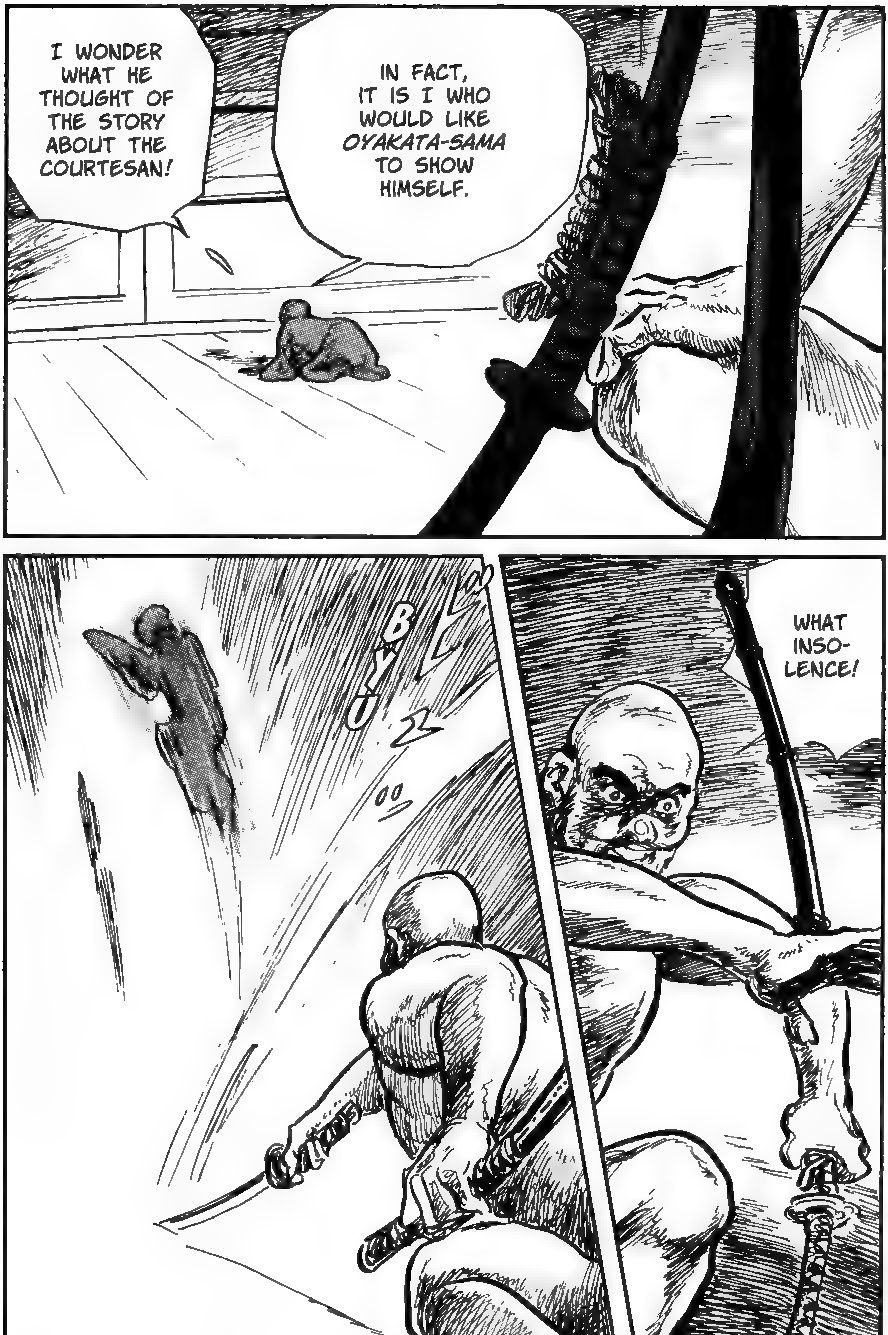
I AM A SUPPA WHO SELLS YOU NOTHING BUT MY SKILL, OYAKATA-SAMA.
IN FACT, IT WOULD BE RUDE TO LET YOU SEE ME.
BUT I ALLOW YOU TO SEE ME ALL THE TIME.
BESIDES, I'M A WAYWARD HACHIYAMONO.
ENOUGH!!
OYAKATA-SAMA, YOU ARE A MOUNTAIN. I AM ONLY GRASS. IF YOU GIVE ME THE ENTIRE PROVINCE OF KAI, I WILL LET ANYONE SEE ME ANY TIME. MOREOVER, I WILL BECOME A VISIBLE MOUNTAIN.

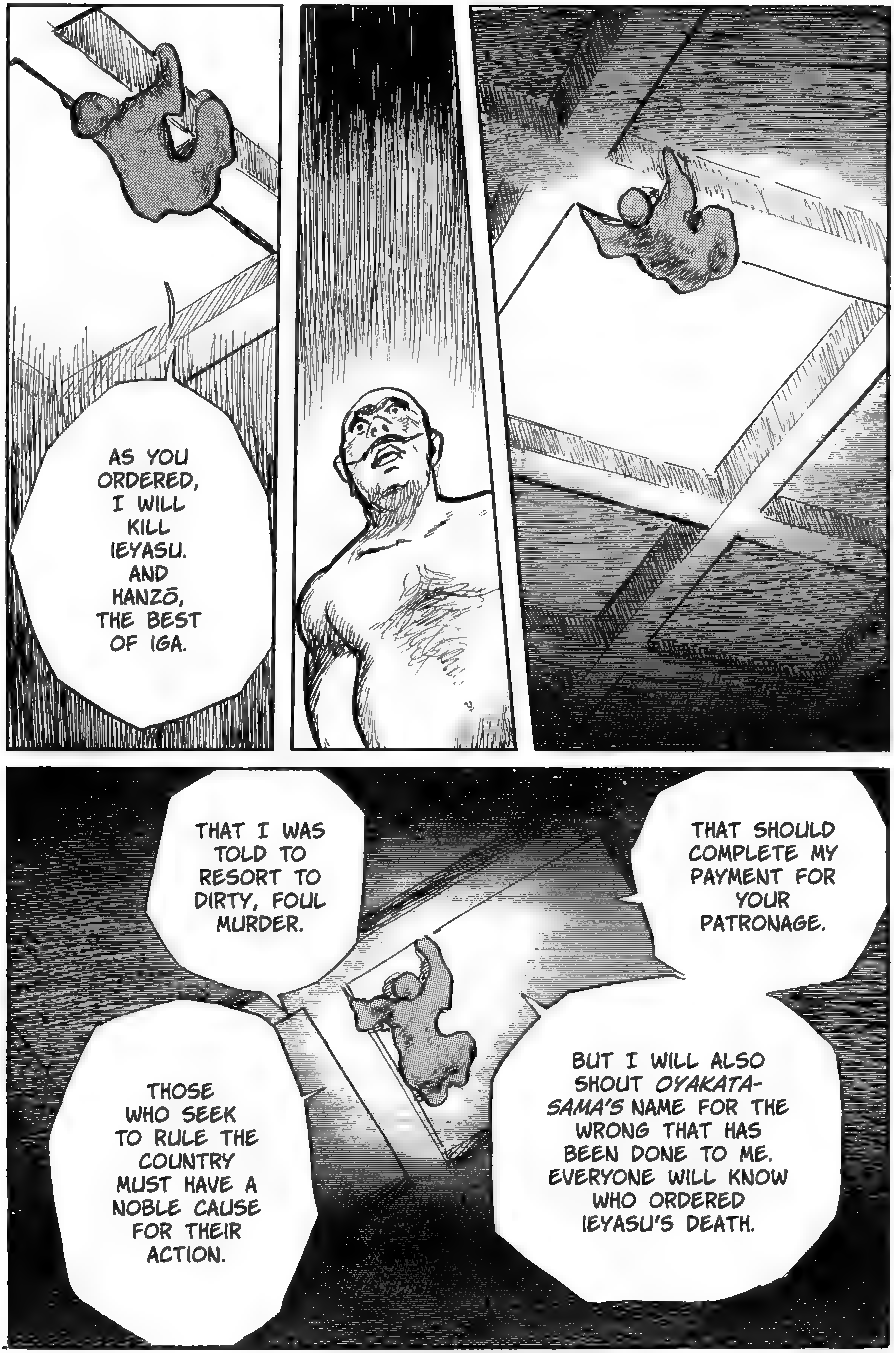
MMMG.
A MAN NAMED AKECHI MITSUHIDE, WHO WAS TAKEN IN BY ODA, SUCCEEDED IN MOVING NANTO ICHIJŌIN KAKKEI-*SAMA* FROM ECHIZEN TO MINŌ.
KAKKEI-*SAMA* NOW ANNOUNCES HIMSELF AS THE FIFTEENTH SHOGUN, YOSHIAKI-*SAMA*. HE HAS BECOME ODA'S FLAG MARK, AND TOGETHER THEY ARE HEADED FOR KYOTO.

YES.
IEYASU WILL BE ON THE MOVE THEN.
AN IMPERIAL SANCTION WAS GRANTED TO IEYASU-SAMA OF OKAZAKI. HE IS NAMED JUGOIGE TOKUGAWA MIKAWA-NO-KAMI.
YES.
CAN YOU KILL HIM?
HA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA.
HE HAS HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA.

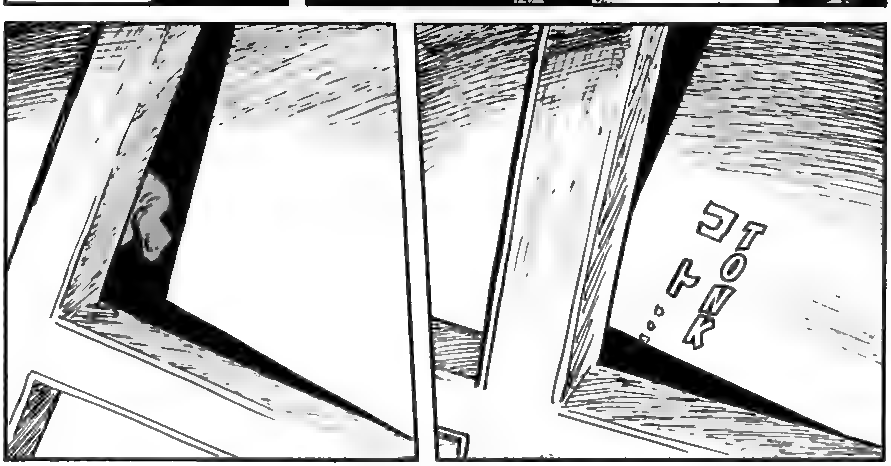

HEH HEH HEH.
HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE.
MMM.
HE IS PRAISED AS THE MAN WHO KILLED KITE KATŌ. I WOULD LIKE TO MEET THIS HANZŌ OF IGA.

SO YOU'LL MAKE ME MURDER IEYASU. AND THEN YOU'LL TELL HANZŌ WHO DID IT.
AND YET, UNLESS YOU TAKE SURUGA BEFORE IEYASU DOES, TAKEDA WILL HAVE NO CHANCE TO TAKE OVER THE NATION.
MIKAWA ISN'T EASY TO ATTACK IF IT'S OPEN WAR. BESIDES, YOU LIKE HANZŌ.
BUT I CAN READ YOUR MIND, OYAKATA-SAMA.
BUT NOW YOU FIND ME, THIS WAYWARD SEKIUN, UNSETTLING. I KNOW TOO MUCH ABOUT TAKEDA'S PLANS.
ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU'RE THINKING?
IN SHORT, AT HEART YOU WANT ME DEAD.
YOU BELIEVE I'VE BEEN USEFUL SO FAR.

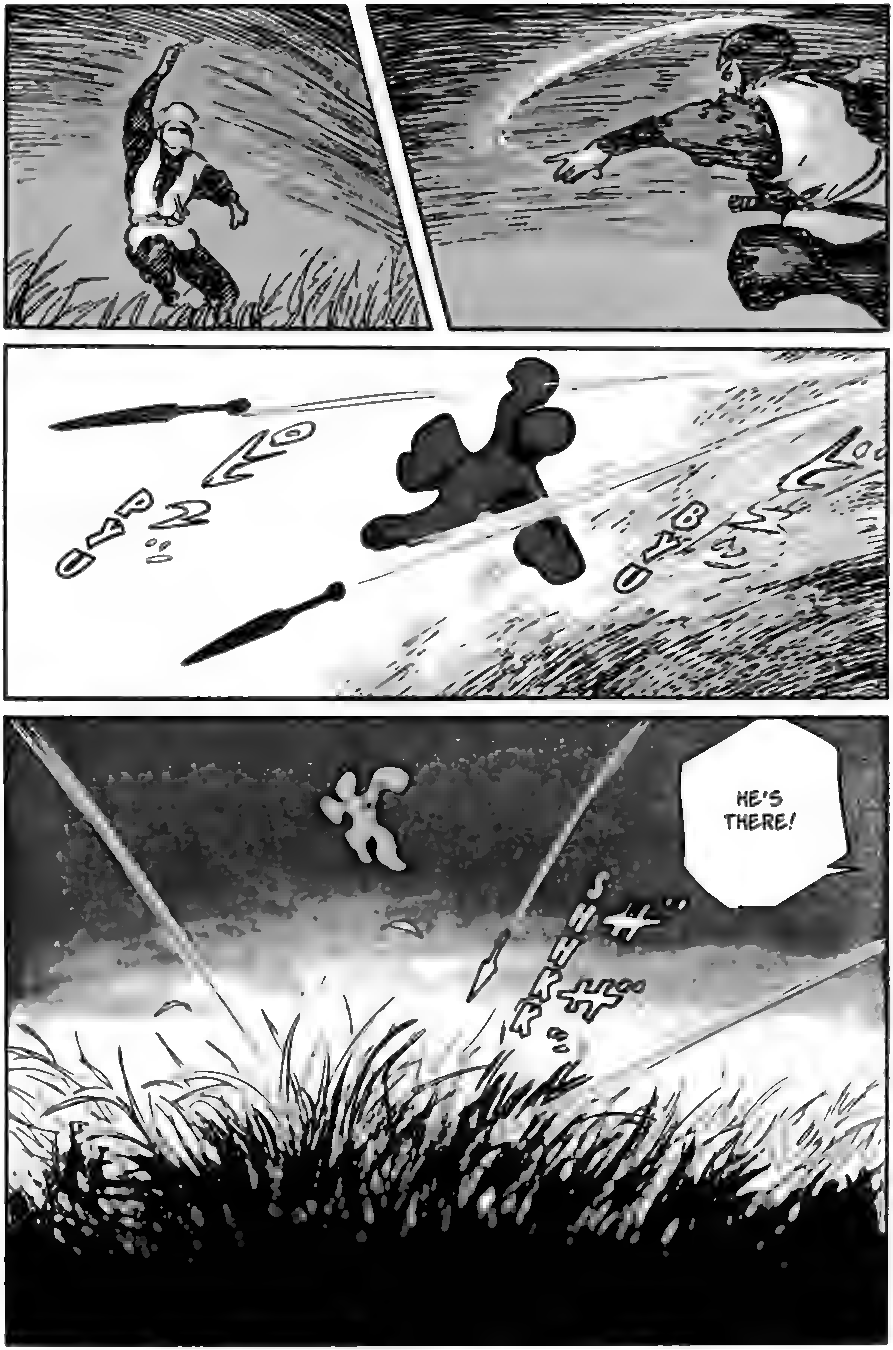

I WONDER WHAT HE THOUGHT OF THE STORY ABOUT THE COURTESAN!
IN FACT, IT IS I WHO WOULD LIKE *OYAKATA-SAMA* TO SHOW HIMSELF.
WHAT INSO-LENCE!


AS YOU ORDERED, I WILL KILL IEYASU. AND HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA.
THAT I WAS TOLD TO RESORT TO DIRTY, FOUL MURDER.
THOSE WHO SEEK TO RULE THE COUNTRY MUST HAVE A NOBLE CAUSE FOR THEIR ACTION.
THAT SHOULD COMPLETE MY PAYMENT FOR YOUR PATRONAGE.
BUT I WILL ALSO SHOUT *OYAKATA-SAMA'S* NAME FOR THE WRONG THAT HAS BEEN DONE TO ME. EVERYONE WILL KNOW WHO ORDERED IEYASU'S DEATH.

FURTHERMORE, THE ONE WHO COMMANDS THE NATION MUST BE POPULAR WITH THE PUBLIC.
MURDERING IEYASU. IT'S THE GREATEST PAYMENT I CAN MAKE TO OYAKATA-SAMA.
HIS POPULARITY WILL BE SURE TO WANE.
HEH HEH HEH HEH.

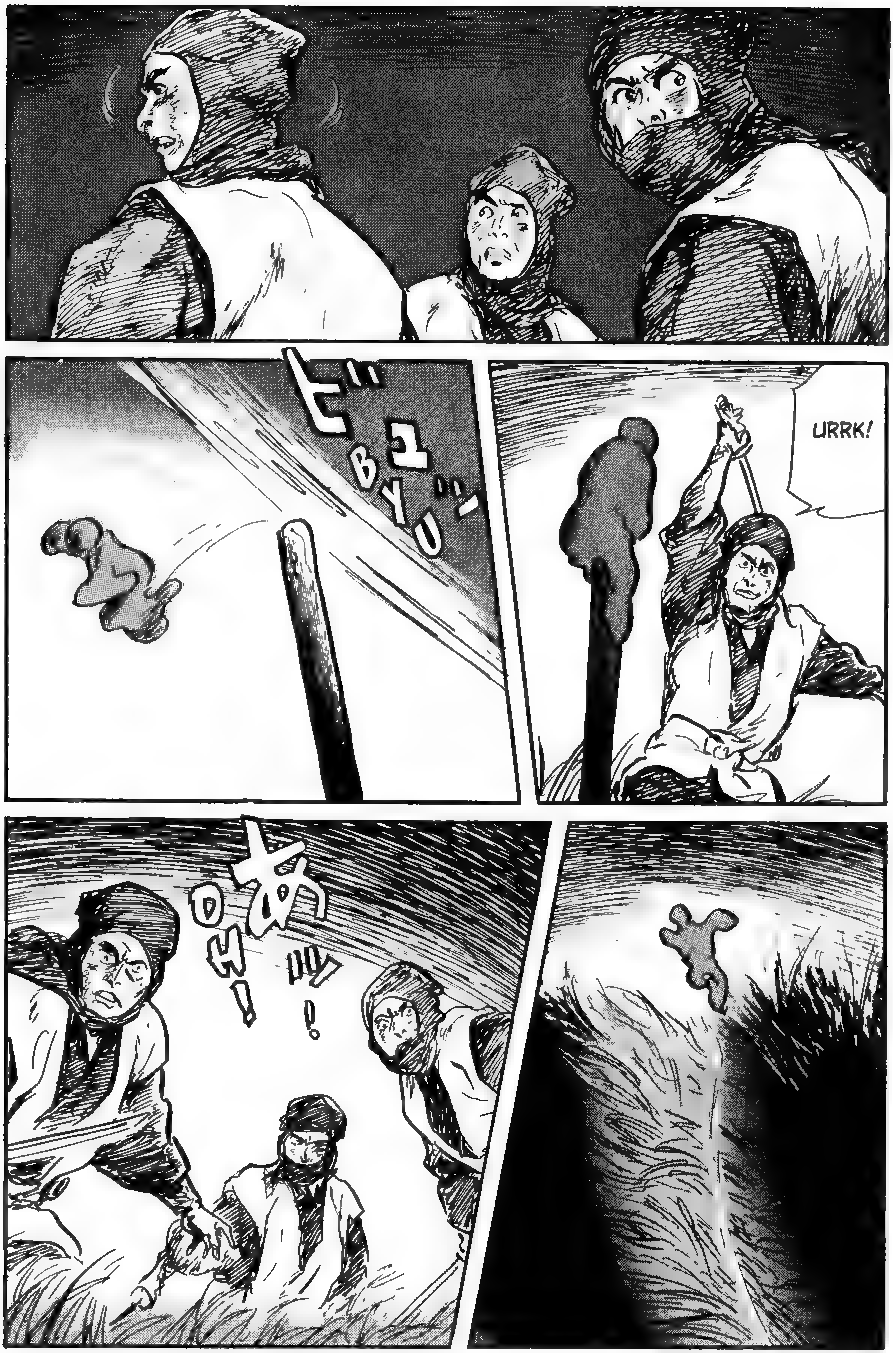

コトン
トク...

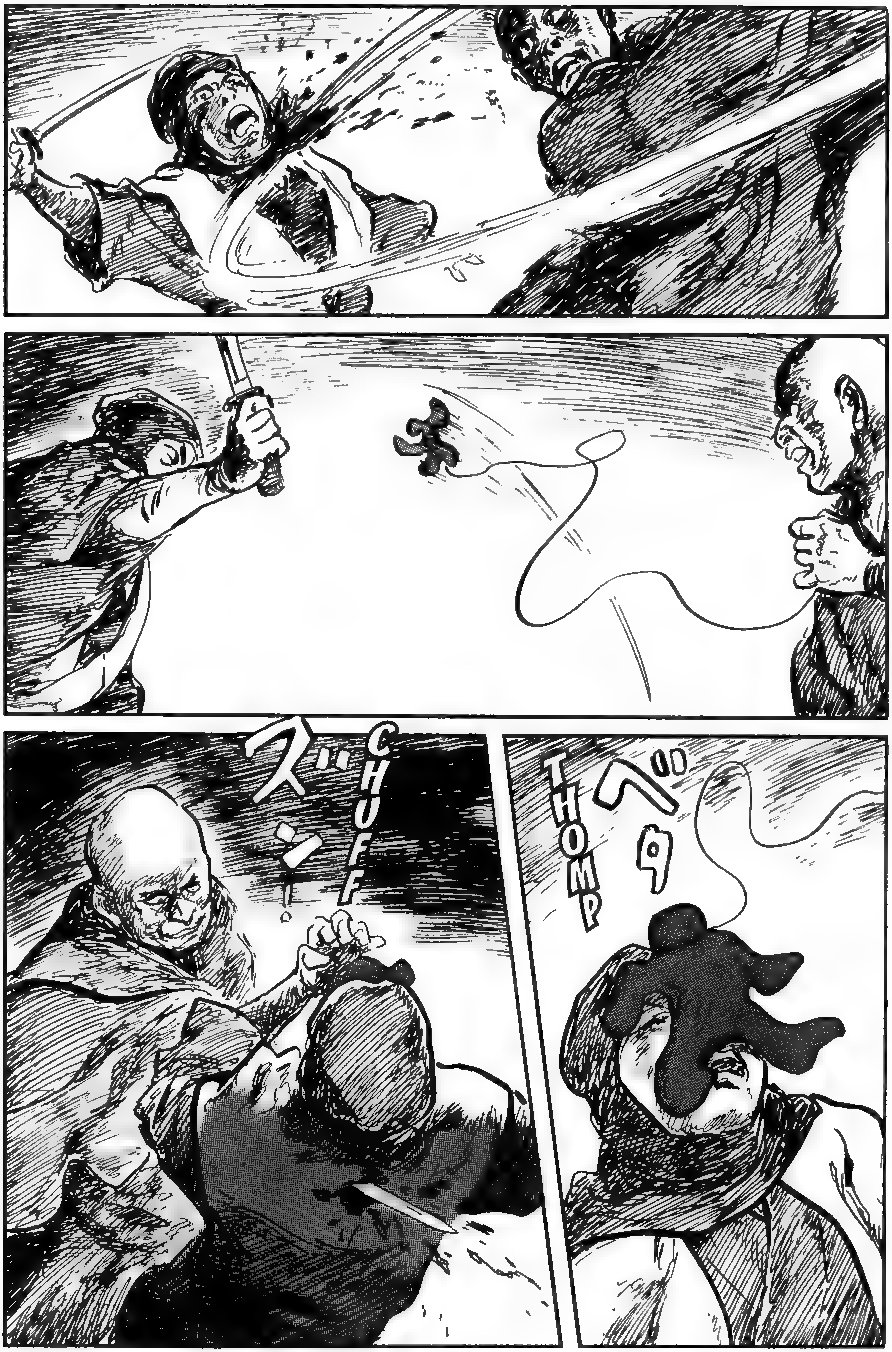
HE'LL KILL OR BE KILLED, IT'S FINE EITHER WAY. THAT'S ALL.
FORGET HIM.

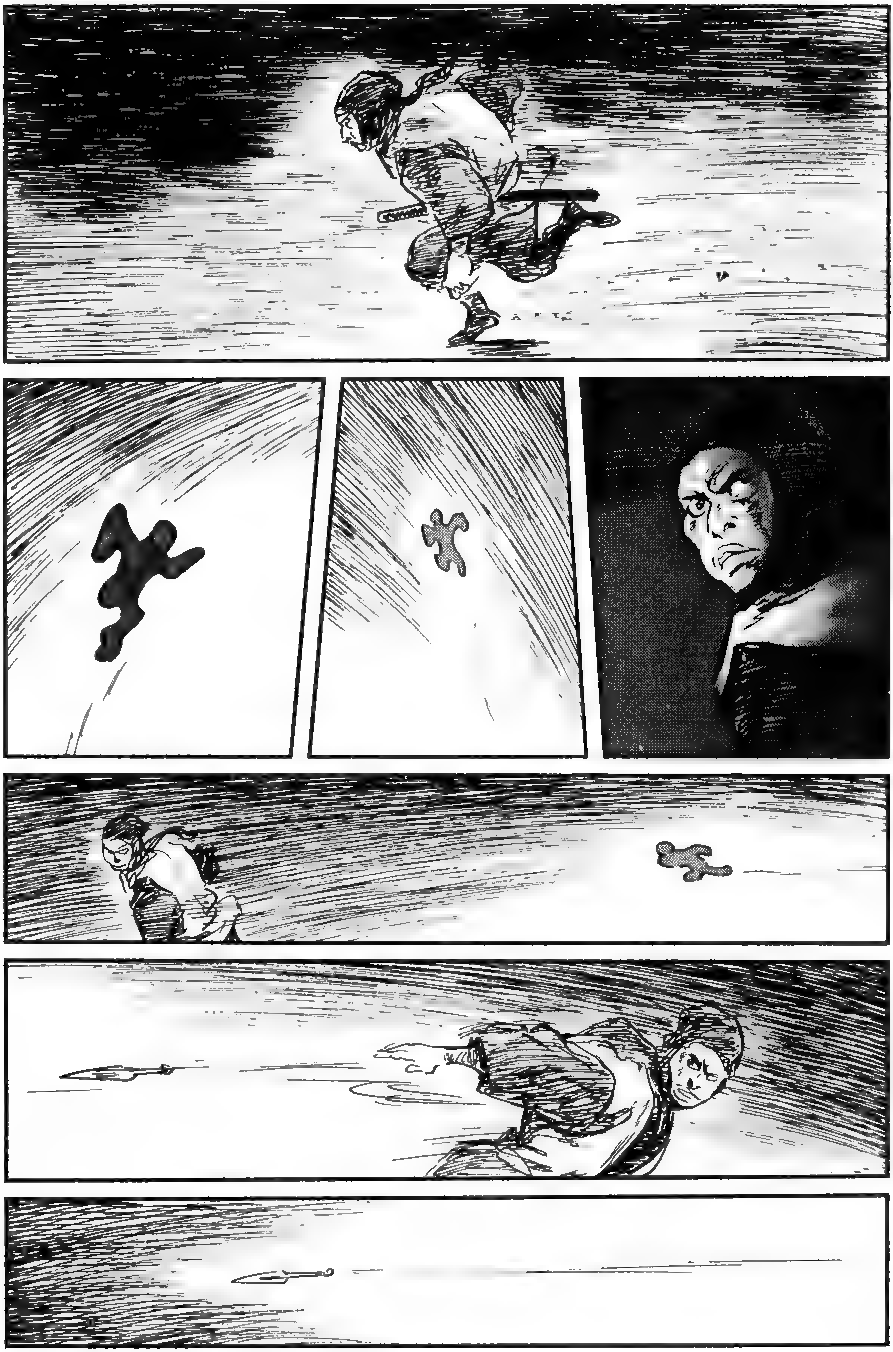

HE'S THERE!

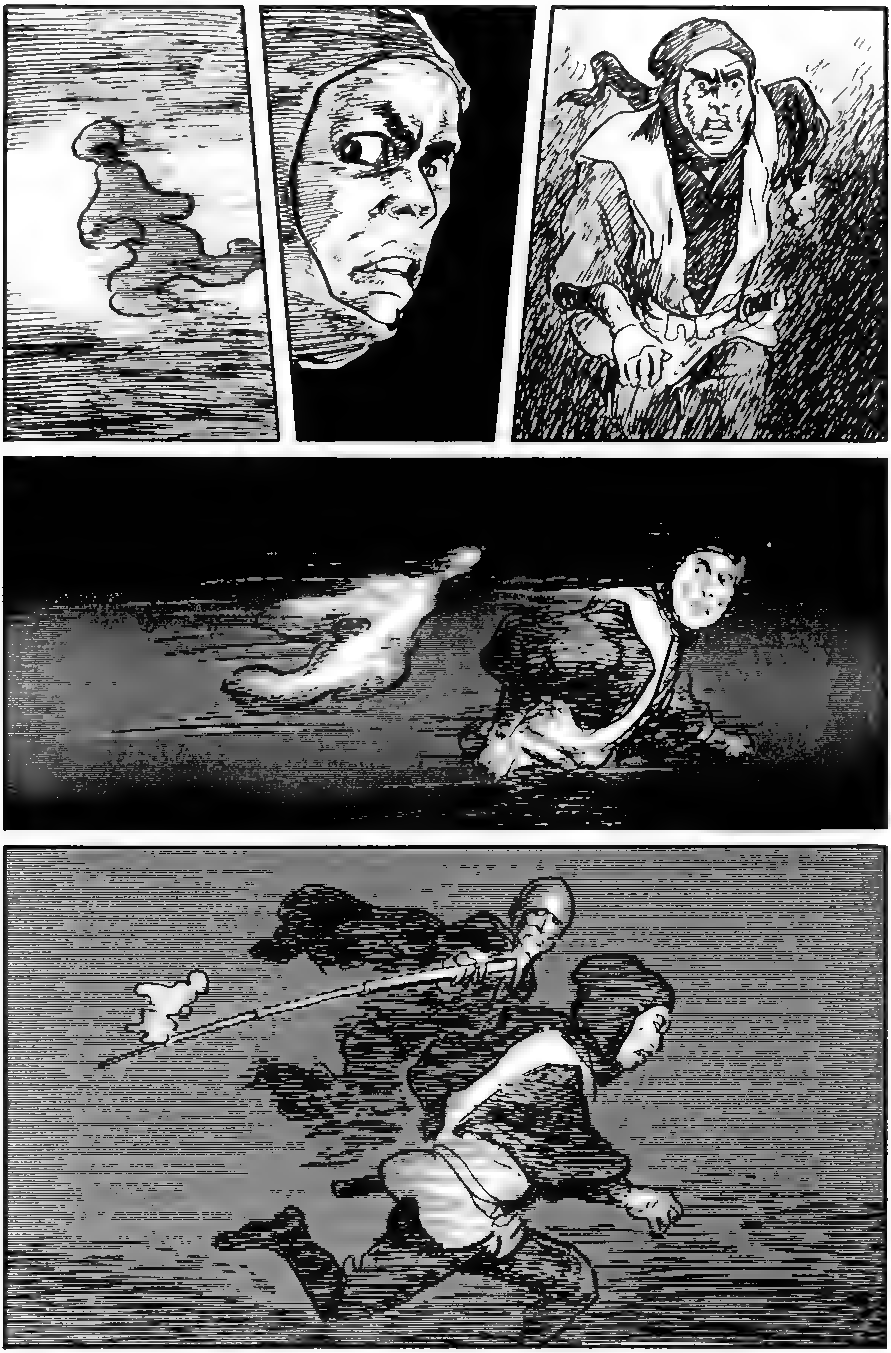
ZA
ザ…

WSH
WSH


ビュ
BYU
URRK!
OH!

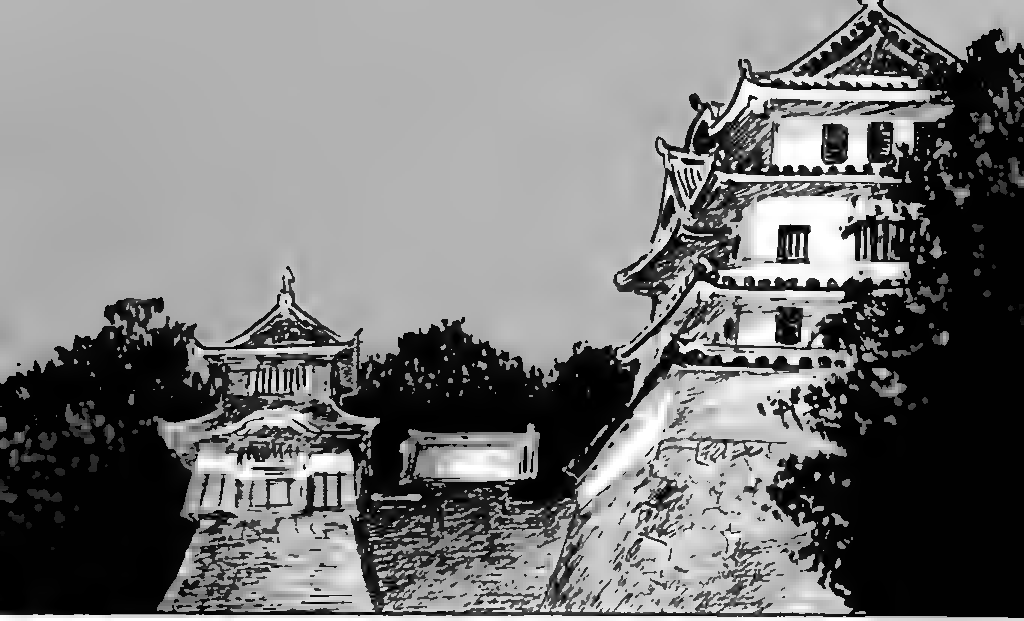

スン
CHUFF
ペタ
THOMP



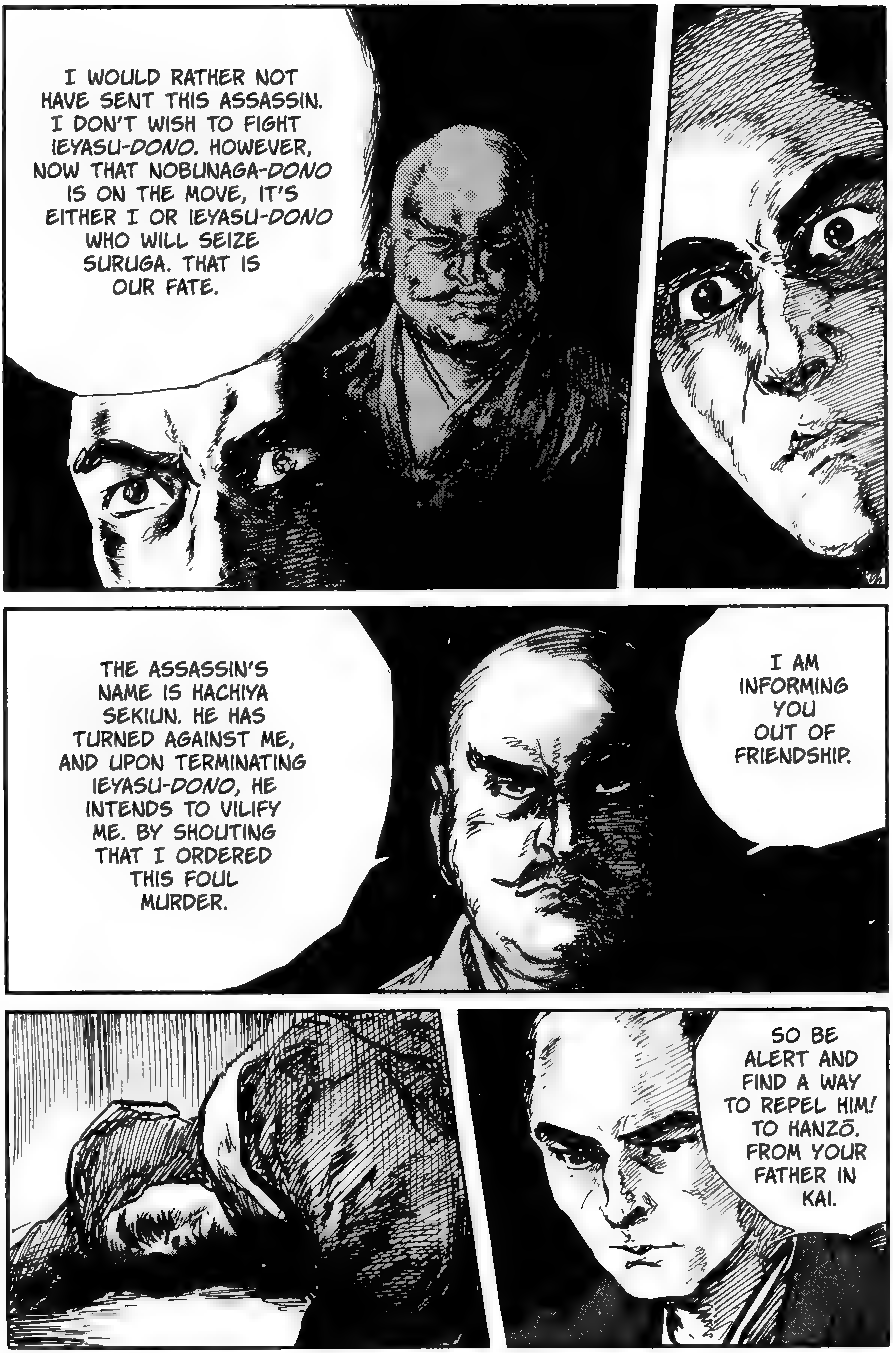


WHOA
ZUN
GOOOSHH

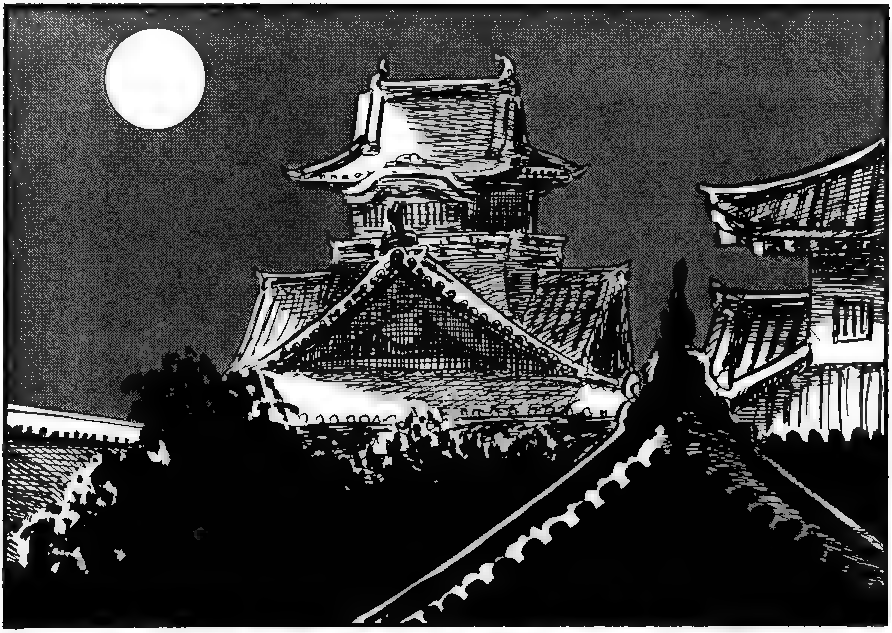
ちっ!
TSK
MMM! WHO'S THERE!!
WHAT'S THAT SMOKE!
T...TO HANZŌ-SAMA...THE BEST OF IGA...

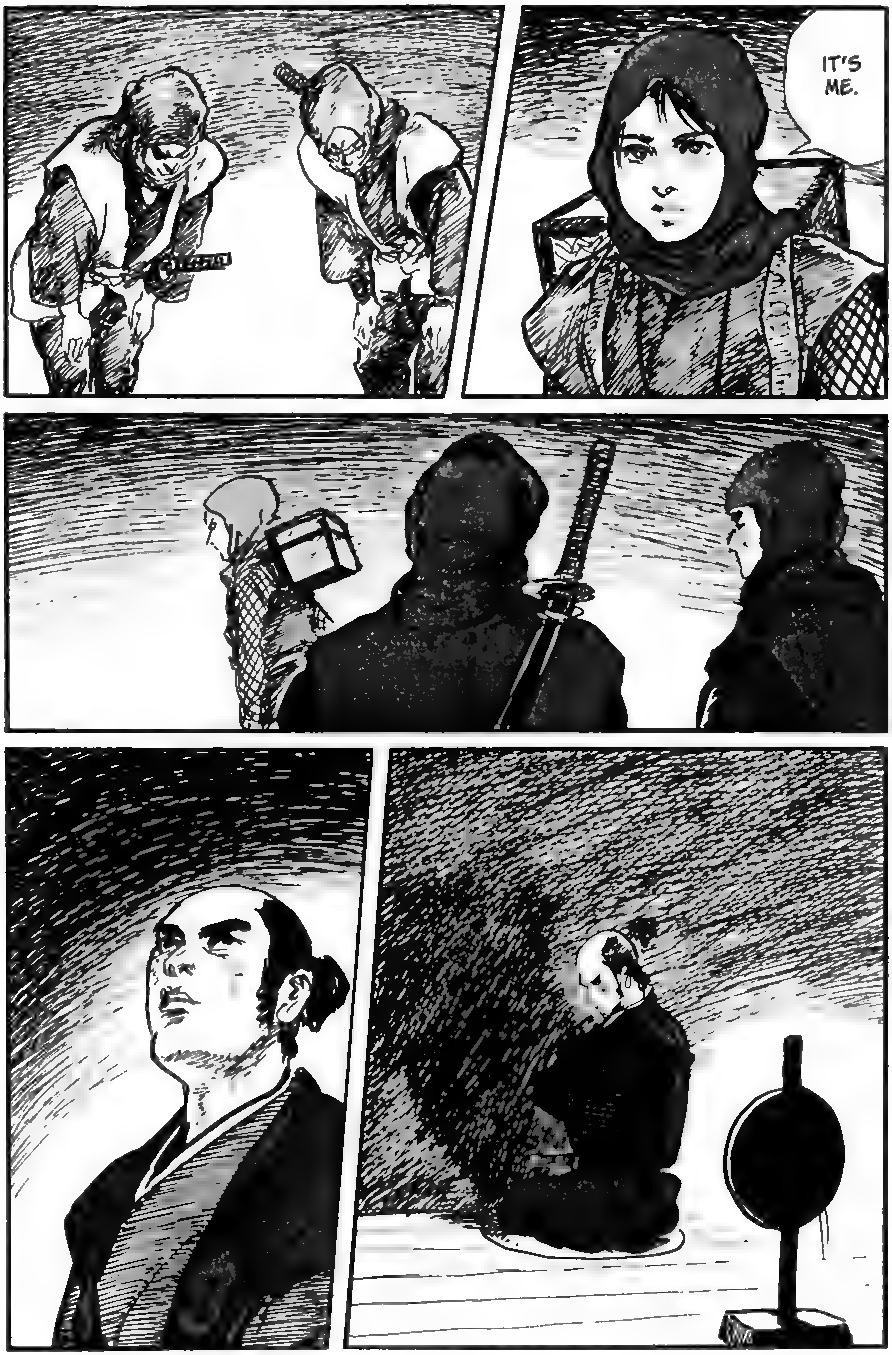


ON MY ORDERS, A DUBIOUS *SUPPA* OF GREAT ABILITY HAS GONE TO OKAZAKI TO TERMINATE IEYASU-*DONO*.
I'M...I'M...A TAKEDA *MITSUMONO*... THIS IS...FROM *OYAKATA-SAMA*... TO HANZŌ-*SAMA* OF IGA.

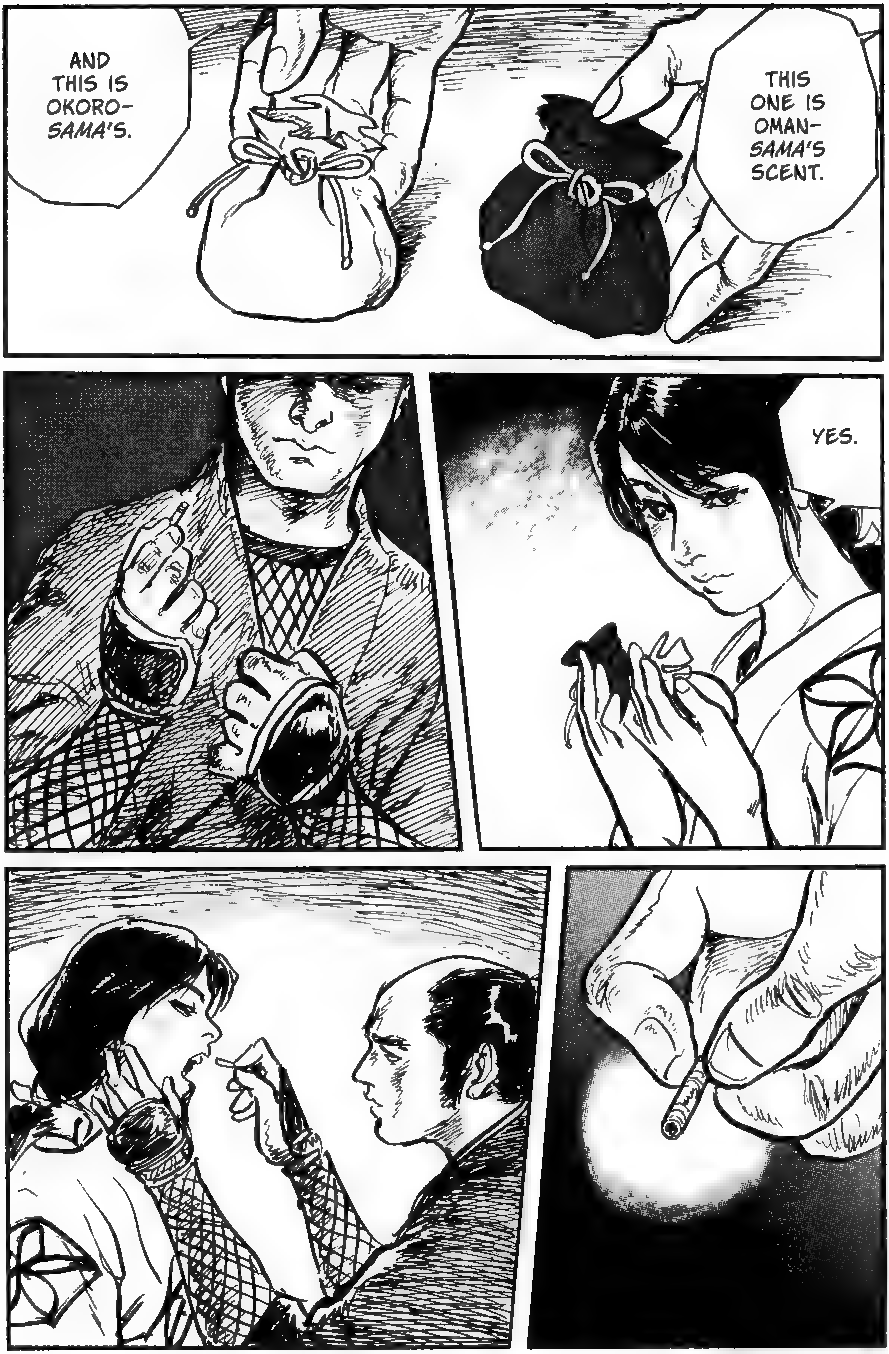

I WOULD RATHER NOT HAVE SENT THIS ASSASSIN. I DON'T WISH TO FIGHT IEYASU-DONO. HOWEVER, NOW THAT NOBUNAGA-DONO IS ON THE MOVE, IT'S EITHER I OR IEYASU-DONO WHO WILL SEIZE SURUGA. THAT IS OUR FATE.
THE ASSASSIN'S NAME IS HACHIYA SEKIUN. HE HAS TURNED AGAINST ME, AND UPON TERMINATING IEYASU-DONO, HE INTENDS TO VILIFY ME. BY SHOUTING THAT I ORDERED THIS FOUL MURDER.
I AM INFORMING YOU OUT OF FRIENDSHIP.
SO BE ALERT AND FIND A WAY TO REPEL HIM! TO HANZŌ. FROM YOUR FATHER IN KAI.

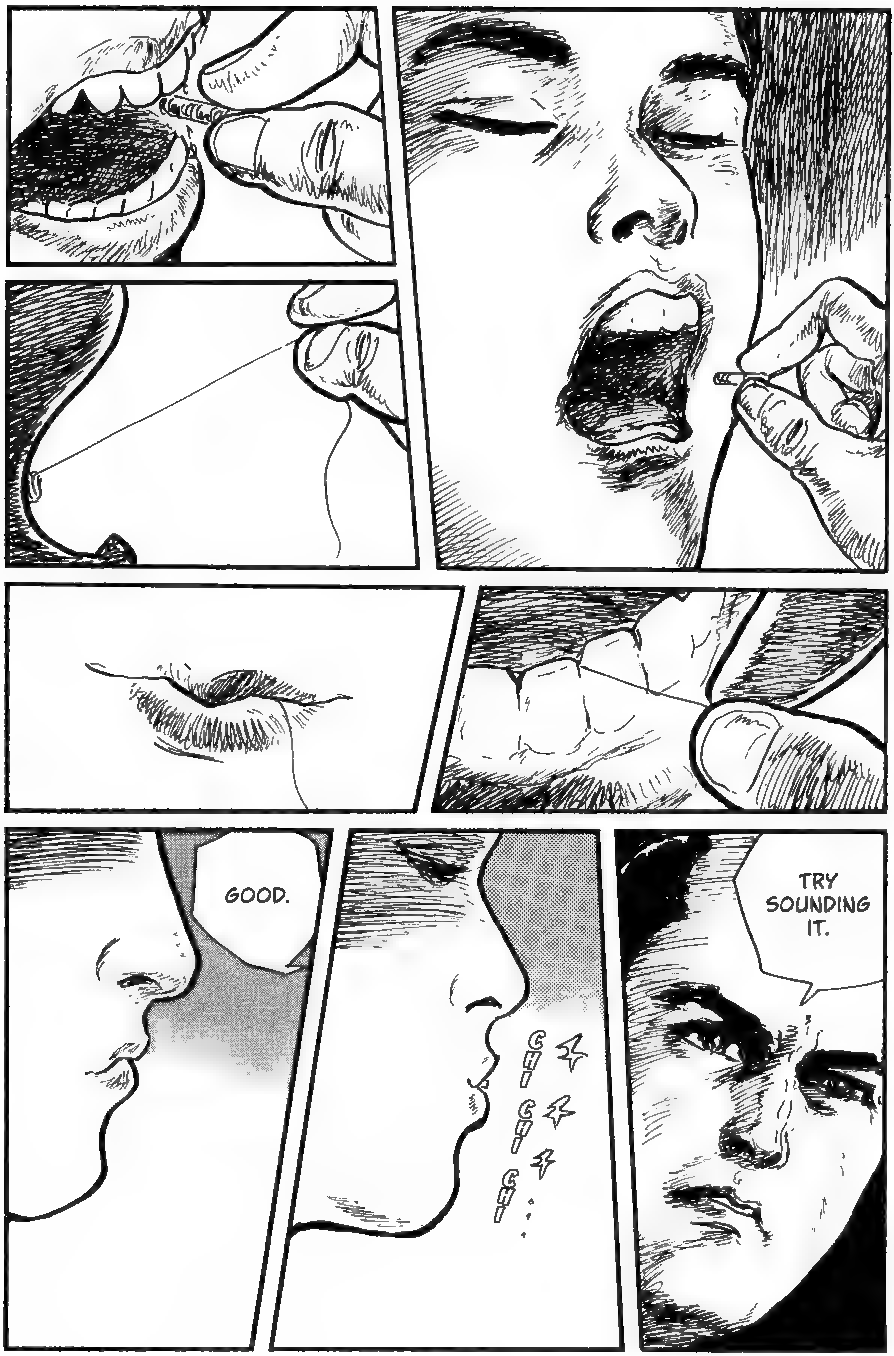
WHAT'S GOING ON?
AN AYAKASHI PUPPETEER. I HEAR THAT HE IS A ROGUE HACHI-YAMONO.
HACHIYA SEKIUN...
WE CAPTURED AN INTRUDER JUST NOW. HE APPEARS TO BE FROM TAKEDA.
HE WAS A MITSUMONO OF SUCH REMARKABLE SKILL THAT WE HAD TO PUT HIM TO THE SWORD. HIS DEATH WAS UNAVOIDABLE...
AS EXPECTED, THEN, THE FIERCE TIGER OF KAI IS ON THE MOVE...

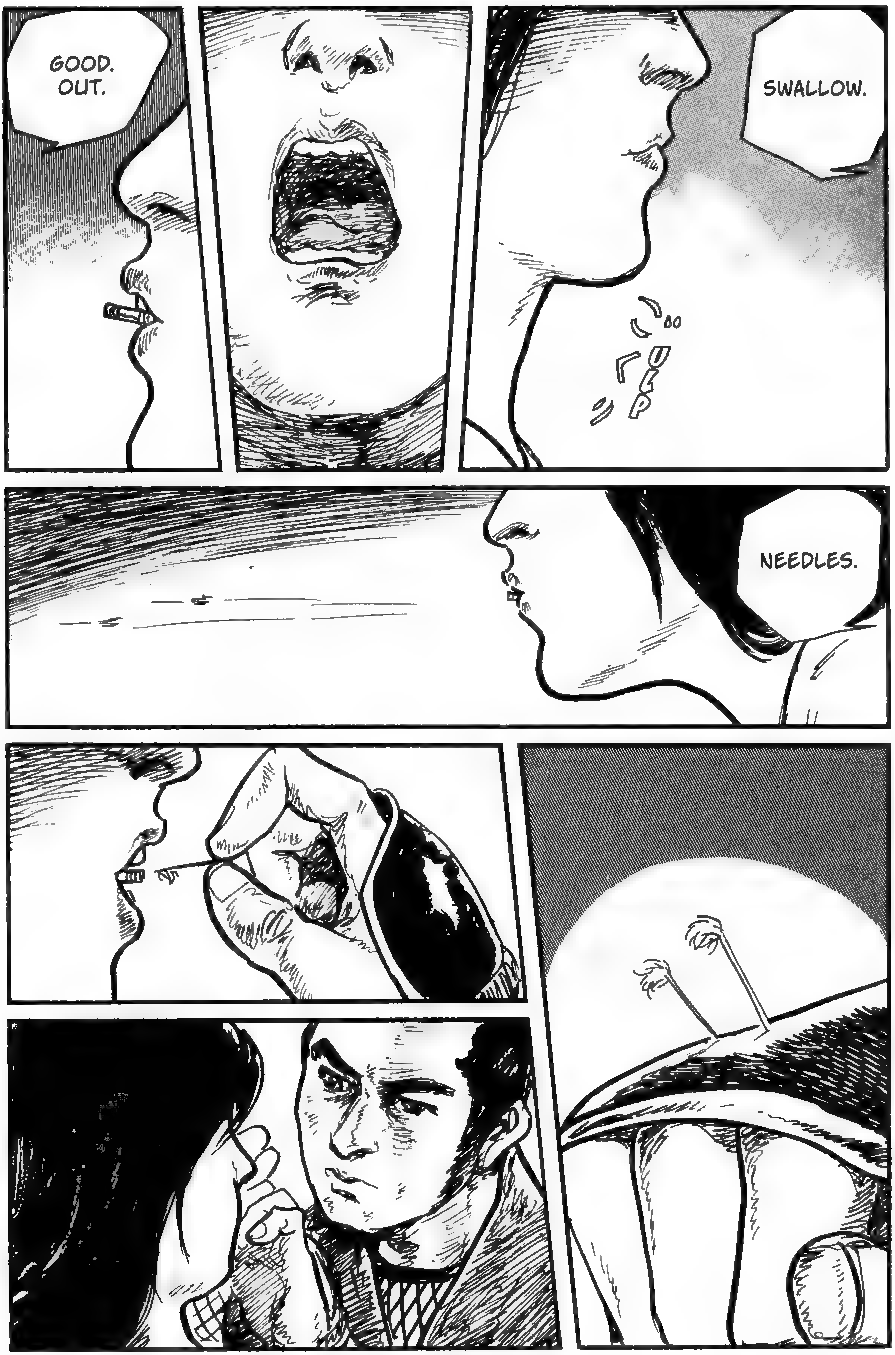


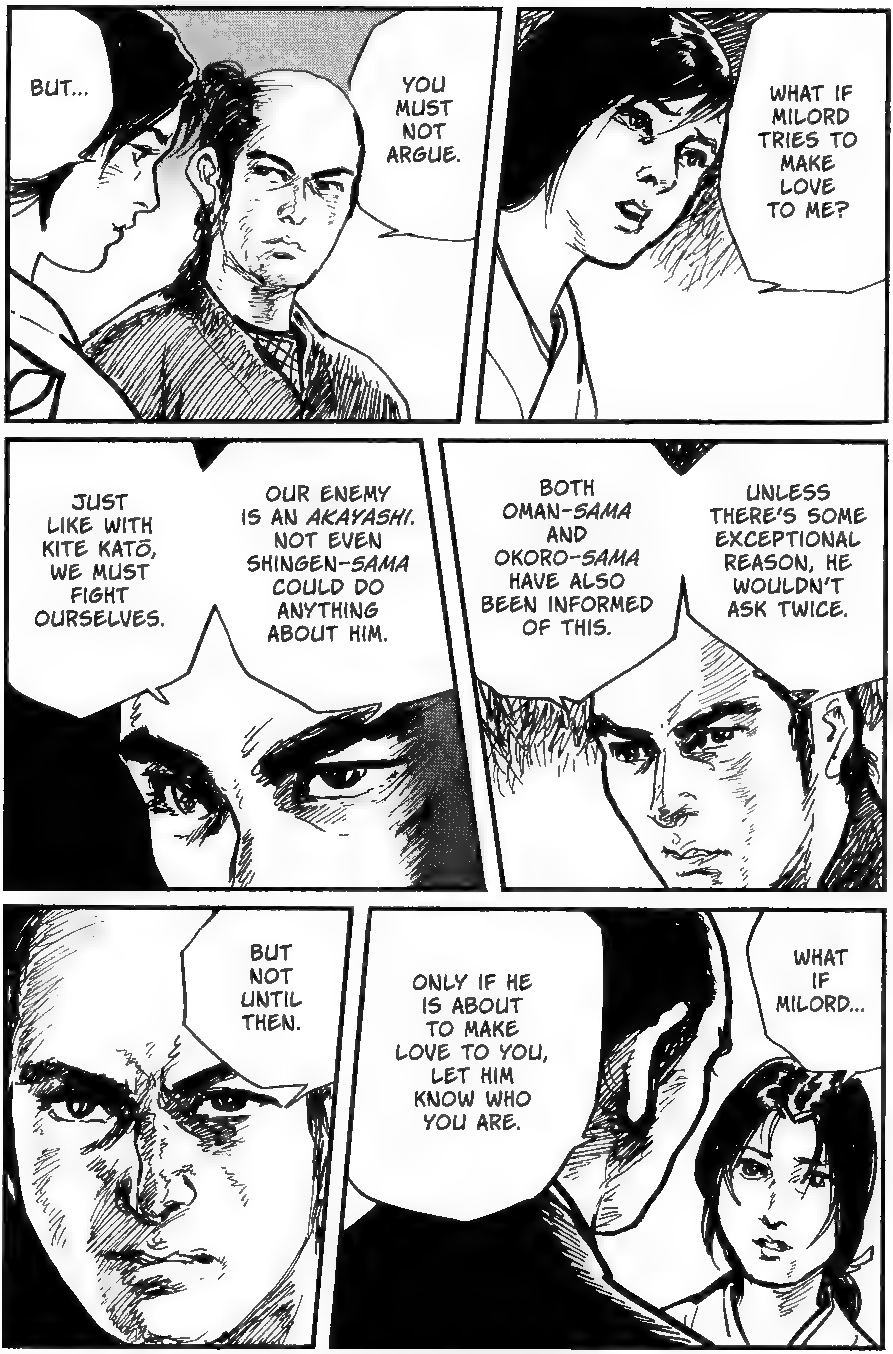

IT'S ME.

IF YOU CAN'T SEE THEM, YOU WON'T FALL INTO HIS SPELL.
YES. THEY'RE PROBABLY HIS CAMOUFLAGE.
BECAUSE HE USES DOLLS?
THE NIGHT OF THE FULL MOON IS MOST DANGER-OUS.
SO THE BEST TIME FOR HIM TO USE HIS TRICK IS, UNDOUBTEDLY, WHEN THE PUPPETS ARE CLEARLY VISIBLE.


AND THIS IS OKORO-SAMA'S.
THIS ONE IS OMAN-SAMA'S SCENT.
YES.


GOOD.
CHI CHI CHI...
TRY SOUNDING IT.


GOOD.
OUT.
SWALLOW.
GULP
NEEDLES.


BUT...
YOU MUST NOT ARGUE.
WHAT IF MILORD TRIES TO MAKE LOVE TO ME?
JUST LIKE WITH KITE KATŌ, WE MUST FIGHT OURSELVES.
OUR ENEMY IS AN *AKAYASHI*. NOT EVEN SHINGEN-*SAMA* COULD DO ANYTHING ABOUT HIM.
BOTH OMAN-*SAMA* AND OKORO-*SAMA* HAVE ALSO BEEN INFORMED OF THIS.
UNLESS THERE'S SOME EXCEPTIONAL REASON, HE WOULDN'T ASK TWICE.
BUT NOT UNTIL THEN.
ONLY IF HE IS ABOUT TO MAKE LOVE TO YOU, LET HIM KNOW WHO YOU ARE.
WHAT IF MILORD...

GLOSSARY

Akechi clan
A Japanese clan that was related to the Toki clan, mainly thriving around the later years of the Sengoku period of the sixteenth century. The Akechi first served under the Toki until the latter ended up falling to the Saito during the year of 1540. Following this the Akechi then became a very powerful clan under the rulership of Oda Nobunaga, especially thanks to the very famous Akechi Mitsuhide. Akechi Mitsuhide served as an intellectual advisor to Nobunaga.

Asakura Yoshikage
(1533–1573) A notable feudal lord of Echizen. It is known that the greatest character flaw of Yoshikage was indecision. As the years passed, Yoshikage decided to serve under the likes of Azai Nagamasa, even launching a pincer attack strategy against Oda Nobunaga. But he failed in the task of capturing him. During the battle of Anegawa, he was defeated before he even reached the battlefield. In the year of 1573 he was sadly betrayed by his own men, and he was forced to kill himself.

Ashikaga Yoshiaki
(1537–1597) The fifteenth, and last, shogun of the Ashikaga shogunate in Japan who reigned from 1568 to 1573. His father, Ashikaga Yoshiharu was the twelfth shogun, and his brother, Ashikaga Yoshiteru was the thirteenth shogun.

Ashikaga Yoshihide
(1538–1568) The fourteenth shogun of the Ashikaga Shogunate who reigned shortly from February to September of 1568 during the Muromachi period of Japan.

Ashikaga Yoshiteru
(1536–1565) The thirteenth shogun of the Ashikaga shogunate who reigned from 1546 to 1565 during the late Muromachi period of Japan. The eldest son of the twelfth shogun, Ashikaga Yoshiharu, his younger brother Ashikaga Yoshiaki would become fifteenth shogun.

Awa province
Awa was an old province of Japan, the area that is today a part of Tokushima prefecture on Shikoku. Awa was bordered by Tosa, Sanuki, and Iyo provinces.

ayakashi
A mask used in *noh* theater that represents a vindictive or violent ghost, god, or powerful warrior.

Azai Nagamasa
(1545–1573) Nagamasa successfully battled both Rokkaku Yoshitaka and Saito Tatsuoki. He married Oda Nobunaga's sister Oichi but later joined the Asakura family and the monks of Mt. Hiei against Nobunaga.

byakujutsu
Atractylodes Macrocephala Koidz; Rhizoma Atractylodis Macrocephalae; Big head Atractylodes Rhizome; Largehead Atractylodes Rhizome.

Chionin temple
The headquarters of the Jodo Shu (Pure Land Sect) founded by Honen (1133–1212).

Chūgoku
The westernmost region of Honshu, the largest island of Japan. The name literally means "middle country," a relic of a historical division of Japan into "near countries" (*kingoku*, but in modern parlance *kinki*), "middle countries," and "far countries" (*ongoku*), based on distance from the capital Nara or Kyoto.

Hachisuka Koroku
(1526 1586) Also known as Hachisuka Masakatsu, a subordinate to Toyotomi Hideyoshi. He was born at the region of Mino. During the construction of the castle at Sunomata, Koroku assisted Hideyoshi, later leading him to become an adviser under Hideyoshi

haja kenshō
A term originally created by Jicang (549 623), a Chinese Buddhist master of Mādhyamika (A.K.A. Sanlun). The term has been translated to: reject evil and establish truth, refute evil and manifest the true law; refute evil and reveal the truth, destroy evil and spread righteousness, denounce heresy and manifest the truth, obliterate evil and proliferate righteousness.

hanbi
Skinned and dried pit viper, Agkistrodon Japonicae

hime
Princess

Honda Shigetsugu
(1529–1596) The son of Honda Shigemasa. Shigetsugu was also known as Honda Sakuzaemon Shigetsugu became a greatly trusted retainer under Tokugawa Ieyasu, serving him during many campaigns such as the battle of Terabe during the year of 1599, along with the battle of Mikatagahara.

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Path of the Assassin*:
dono – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures
san – the most common, used among equals or near-equals
sama used for superiors. Sometimes spoken as "saa"
sensei used for teachers, masters, respected entertainers, and politicians.

Hosokawa Fujitaka
(1534–1610) Known as Hosokawa Yūsai, the son of Mibuchi Harusada, but adopted by the likes of Hosokawa Mototsune. Fujitaka was a member of the Ashikaga court, under that of the current Ashikaga shogun, Yoshiteru

Ichijōin
One of the *tacchu* that existed at Kōfukuji temple. *Tacchu* are sub-temples built usually in memory of the departed chief priests, or great ones who achieved outstanding things.

ikko-ikki
The Japanese *ikko ikki*, literally "single-minded leagues," were mobs of peasant farmers and low-status samurai, who rose up against samurai rule in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They followed the beliefs of the Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, which taught that all believers are equally saved by Amida Buddha's grace

jingi-kan
Jingi-kan was the department of worship, one of the two main governing departments installed by the *ritsuryo* legal system in eighth–century Japan.

jugoige
Junior fifth ranks, a lower grade retainer

Kakkei
Ashikaga Yoshiaki's name when he was the priest of Nanto Ichijōin

kanpaku
A title given to a senior adviser of the emperor.

katana
Katana is the word for "sword" in the Japanese language It is also used specifically for a type of Japanese backsword or longsword (*daitō*) in use after the 1400s: a curved, single-edged sword traditionally used by the samurai.

kunai
A kunai is an ancient kind of trowel, originated during the Tensho era in Japan. Contrary to popular belief, they were not designed as throwing weapons, though they can definitely be thrown and cause damage. *Ninjutsu* is very versatile in the way it employs weapons and non-weapons. A ninja could work as a gardener during the day and use a kunai without raising suspicion

Kōji
A Japanese era after Temmon and before Eiroku, spanning from 1555 to 1558. Reigning emperors were Go-nara and Ōgimachi

Konoe family
The Konoe family was a branch of the Fujiwara clan. As one of the five regent houses, the Konoe family monopolized the offices of *sessho* and *kampaku* along with Takatsukasa, Kujo, Nijo, and Ichijo families.

Konoe Sakihisa
Held the post of *kanpaku* from 1554 to 1568 for emperor Go-nara and emperor Ogimachi.

Kōriki Kiyonaga
(1530–March 12, 1608) A daimyo in Azuchi-Momoyama period and Edo period. He was a retainer of the Tokugawa clan. His father was Koriki Yasunaga.

kuge
The *kuge* was a Japanese aristocratic class that dominated the Japanese imperial court in Kyoto until the rise of the shogunate in the twelfth century at which point it was eclipsed by the *daimyo*. The *kuge* still provided a weak court around the emperor right up until the Meiji restoration.

kunoichi
Female ninja

kusuriyu
A warm, healing bath steeped in galenicals.

kyōyū
A general or samurai who does not trust his soldiers or vassals Also note, *kyōyū* – *kyō* (owl) + *yu* (hero).

mamorigatana
Mamori (defense/protection) + *gatana* (katana = sword).

mitsumono
Another world for ninja.

Miyoshi clan
The Miyoshi clan of the Awa province of Shikoku entered the Sengoku period as retainers under the Hosokawa The Miyoshi family was increasingly relied on due to the Hosokawa vying for control of the position of *kanrei*.

Mōri Motonari
(1497–1571) A prominent *daimyō* in the west Chugoku region during the Sengoku period of the sixteenth century.

monshu
A chief priest who was born an imperial prince.

Nanto
Kōfukuji temple.

Nōbi plain
A coastal area which surrounds Nagoya in Aichi prefecture. One of the most important plains in Japan.

oyakata
A term used to address the head of a clan by clan members.

rinzai
What the Linji Yixuan is known as in Japanese. Linji Yixuan was the founder of the Linji school of Chan Buddhism during Tang dynasty China.

ritsuryo
The historical law system based on the philosophies of Confucianism and Chinese legalism in Japan. The political

system in accord to *ritsuryo* is called "*ritsuryo sei*."

sake
Japanese rice wine.

Sanjō Munechika
A renowned swordsmith in the Heian period (794–1185)

Seiganji temple
One of the temples in Mikawa (Aichi prefecture).

Seiwa Genji
The most successful and powerful of the many branch families of the Minamoto clan. Many of the most famous Minamoto warriors, including Minamoto Yoshiie also known as "Hachimantaro" or god of war, and Minamoto no Yoritomo, the founder of the Kamakura shogunate, were descended from this line

shinobi
Ninja

shugo
The title given officials in feudal Japan who were appointed by the shogun to oversee a province (*kuni*).

Suruga
The province in which Sunpu is located, in the area that is today the eastern part of Shizuoka prefecture. Suruga bordered on Izu, Kai, Sagami, Shinano, and Totomi provinces.

suzu
Bell.

tatami
Straw matting used as a floor covering a Japanese house.

takechiyo
Take (bamboo) + *chiyo* (thousand generations)

Takenaka Hanbei Shigeharu
Served the Saito clan of Mino, but later plotted an uprising and took over the Saito castle at Inabayama Toyotomi Hideyoshi was so incredibly impressed by this tactic, he invited Hanbei to join his forces as a strategist.

tengu
Tengu are minor *kami* found in Japanese folklore. They are a part of the traditions of most Japanese religions including Shinto and Buddhism, where they are classified as *marakayikas*. They are sometimes identified with the gods Saruta-Hiko, Susanoo, and Karura. Tengu are popular subjects of Japanese art, theater, and literature.

tenka fubu
"Spread the militarism over the whole land" or "spread the militarism under the sky."

Toki clan
Flamboyant local *daimyo* of the early Sengoku period who ruled the whole of Mino.

Tsukahara Bokuden
(1489 1571) A famous swordsman of early Sengoku period. He was widely regarded as a *kensei* (sword saint).

Wa
Signifies "ring," "circle," "hoop," or "loop" in some cases, and "peace," "harmony," "unity," and "union" in other cases We'll allow the individual reader to decide to which a character refers when using the term in this volume.

Yozaemon
A name sometimes used by Kōriki Kiyonaga.

Zhuge Liang
(A.K.A. Kongming) Celebrated adviser to Liu Bei, founder of the Shu-*han* dynasty of the Six Dynasties period. Liu was so impressed with Zhuge that on his deathbed he urged Zhuge to take the throne himself if his own son proved incapable. A genius in mechanics and mathematics, Zhuge is credited with inventing a bow for shooting several arrows at once and with perfecting the "eight dispositions," a series of military tactics.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman,* Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku,* a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

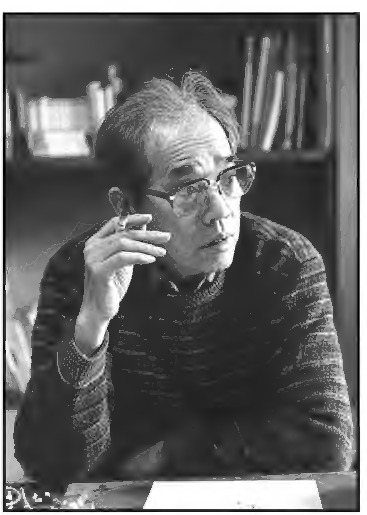
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami* (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). Many additional series would follow, including *Path of the Assassin* and *Samurai Executioner*.

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of seventy-one.



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